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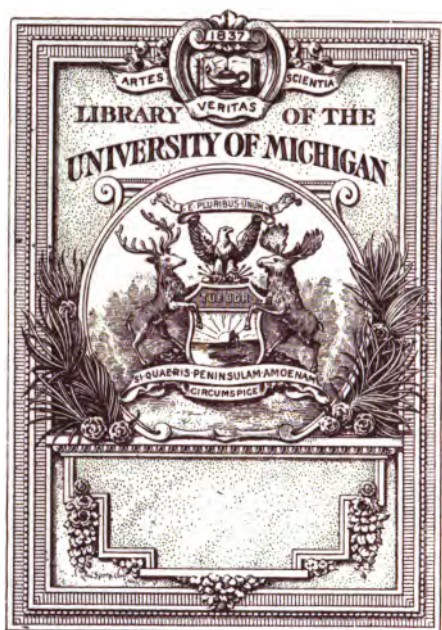
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THE PRINCESS SONIA



1970



"THE BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN . . . HAD STEPPED
BACK FROM HER EASEL." (SEE PAGE 3.)

THE PRINCESS SONIA

BY

JULIA MAGRUDER



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHARLES DANA GIBSON



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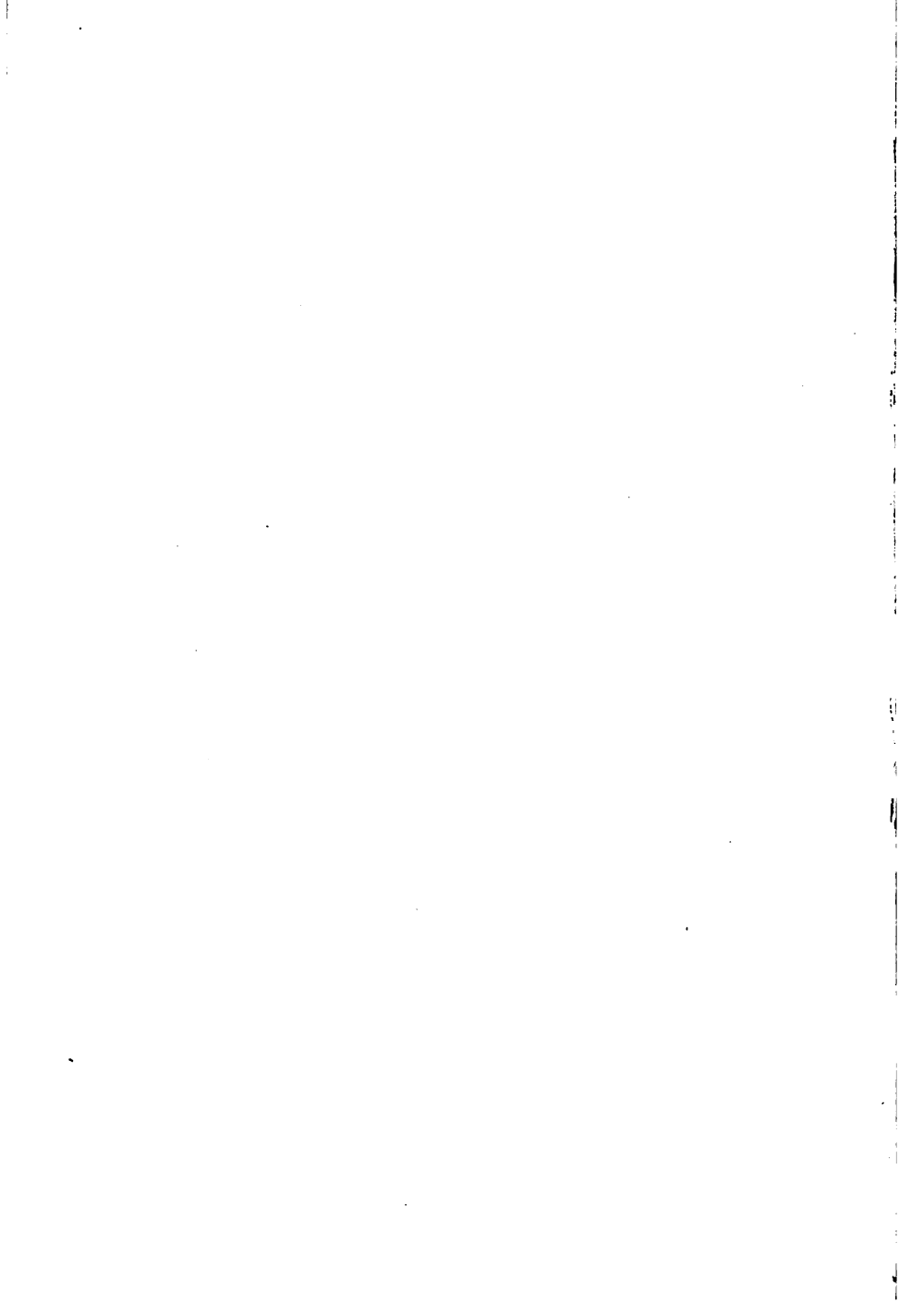
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TO GENEVIEVE

181753



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THE PRINCESS SONIA

THE PRINCESS SONIA

I

MARTHA KEENE had been at work for several months in Etienne's atelier, in the Latin quarter of Paris, and although her appearance would have led one to believe her frail in health, she had never missed a working-day, and always occupied a good position well in view of the model, because she always came among the earliest to secure it. Her work was far from brilliant, and Etienne had noticed her very little at first. If he did so more of late, it was her ability to stick which had won her this favor. So many students had come and gone, rousing his hopes only to disappoint them, that it had got to be rather a comfort to the little old man to be sure of one earnest worker always in her place; and while he could not say that her work was good, it was certainly not bad.

Recently he had told Martha this several times. "Not bad" was about the highest praise that most of Etienne's pupils got from him; and when the young American girl heard it for the first time applied to her work, she experienced what was perhaps one of the most thrilling sensations of her life.

It was followed by another thrilling sensation; for, as she looked up from the canvas which the master had thus commended, she met the beautiful eyes of the princess, turned upon her with a congratulatory smile.

It was almost too much for Martha. Her heart thumped so that her breathing became rapid and a little difficult. Instead of answering the princess's smile, a frown contracted her forehead; for she was afraid that she was going to lose her self-control, and she needed a stern effort not to do so. Martha had a heart which was made for worshiping. Etienne and the princess were two of the people that she worshiped, and there was a third.

When Etienne had passed on, after smudging one part of her drawing with his thumb until it was a dirty blur, and scratching another part with ruthless streaks of soft charcoal, she remembered she had received his

first words of encouragement rather coldly, and had made the same sort of return for the princess's smile. This plunged her from a state of delight into one of wretchedness. She looked toward the master with some hope of making amends; but he was too absorbed in his next criticism, and it was only too evident that her chance was gone. Then she glanced at the princess, to receive the same impression from that quarter. The beautiful young woman on whom her eyes rested had stepped back from her easel, and with her head turned sidewise, and her eyelids drawn up, was looking at her picture. She held a brush in one hand, with the fingers delicately poised, and in the other her palette, laid with brilliant dabs of color. Her lips were pursed critically, and her whole attitude and expression showed such absorption in her work that Martha felt it would be absurd to imagine that she or her behavior could have any part in that beautiful lady's consciousness.

As usual, when Martha allowed herself to look at the princess, she forgot everything else. She had long ago had to make it a rule to place her easel so that she would be turned away from her enchantress while she was work-

forbidden during work-hours, except the little absolutely necessary whispering; and in the intermission at noon the princess always went away for lunch, and sometimes did not return. Martha, too, went to her mother's apartment for the midday meal, though nothing ever prevented her from returning. Some of the students had chums, with whom they chatted glibly in the cloak-room; but as a rule, these intimacies had been formed outside.

Martha Keene was a girl who would never have made the first advance toward an acquaintance with any one; for, although she had passed her twentieth year, she was incorrigibly shy. This reserve of manner was so evident that it discouraged advances from others. She knew this and regretted it, but could not help it.

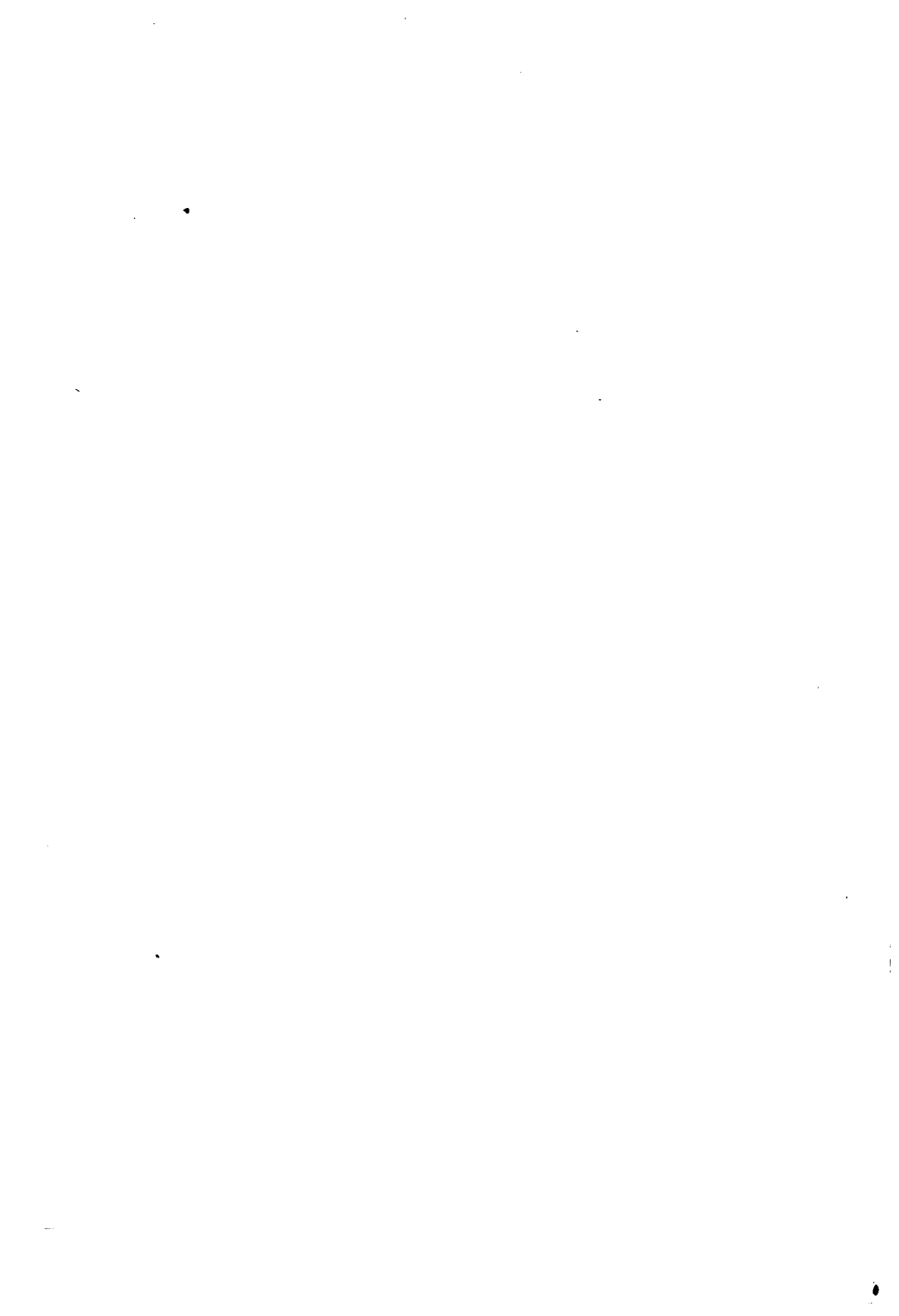
It had pleased Martha very much when, on a single occasion, this wall of isolation which she had built around herself had been broken through by a little American chatterbox, who had rattled away to her for ten minutes one day as she was waiting for her carriage in the cloak-room. This had been soon after her entrance at Etienne's, and her voluble country-woman had vanished from the horizon the

next day ; but in that one talk she had got almost all the knowledge of the atelier which she possessed.

Her informant had told her that the students were not supposed to inquire about one another at all, the ideal of the atelier being a place where high and low alike could lay aside their disabilities and get the benefits of the common workshop. She added that there had been several personages of importance studying there since she herself had been a student, but that she had always heard of it from the outside, and they had generally left before she had identified them. "I spotted the princess, though," she had said. "As soon as I heard that there was a Russian princess studying here, I picked her out. Do you know which one she is?" Martha had answered, "The lady in the red blouse"—a guess at once confirmed. "Is n't she stunning?" her companion had gone on; "I'm dying to speak to her! If she were not a princess, I'd have done it long ago. I can't go the Russian; but no doubt she speaks every language. Russians always do." At this point of the conversation the lady herself had come into the cloak-room. A neat French maid who was



"A LITTLE AMERICAN CHATTERBOX."



in waiting had come forward, and held out her lady's wrap, a magnificent sable thing, in which the beautiful creature had quickly in-folded herself, and left the room, the two girls meanwhile making a tremendous effort to cover their breathless interest by an air of unconsciousness.

Ever since that day— indeed, even before it — Martha had been a silent worshiper at the shrine of the princess. She had a passionate love of beauty, and her heart, for all her grave and shy exterior, was packed as full of romance as it could hold. The discovery that this beautiful being was a princess—and a Russian princess, of all others—was meet food for this appetite for the romantic; and she dreamed by the hour about this young woman's life, and wondered what it had been and was to be. She knew she could not be many years older than herself, and she wondered, with burning interest, whether she was or was not married. Sometimes she would hold to one opinion for days, and then something — a mere turn of expression, perhaps — would convert her to the opposite one. She wanted her to be unmarried, so that she might be free to construct from her imagination a beautiful

future for her ; and yet she dreaded to find out that she was married. There was certainly a look about the princess which contradicted Martha's ideal of her as the possessor of a fair, unwritten life-page. Martha had watched her hands to see if she wore a wedding-ring ; but those extraordinarily beautiful hands were either loaded down with jeweled gauds of antique workmanship or else quite ringless. Still, many married women were careless about wearing their wedding-rings, a thing which Martha herself could not comprehend ; but she felt that this wonderful creature was removed as far as possible from her in both actuality and ideas.

Martha had heard the sound of the princess's voice only once or twice, and on those occasions she had spoken French with what seemed to the American girl an absolutely perfect accent. Once she had been near enough to hear a little talk between the princess and Etienne, as he was criticizing the former's work with rather more humanness, Martha thought, than he showed to the students generally ; and once or twice when the princess had been placed near the model's little retiring-room, Martha had had the joy of hearing her divinity give

the summons, in the usual atelier jargon, "C'est l'heure!" It seemed to the girl a most lovable act of condescension on the part of her Serene Highness.

One day (it was the day after Etienne had told her that her drawing was "not bad," and the princess had smiled at her) Martha was working away, when she became aware that an easel was being pushed into the unoccupied space at her right hand. She had known that some one would soon take possession of this place, and she did not even look round to see who it was. Her whole attention was bent on making Etienne see that his encouragement had yielded good fruit, even though she had made no verbal acknowledgment of it. She went on drawing, with intense concentration, until, weary at last, she put down her charcoal, and stood resting her arms, with her hands on her hips. As she finished her scrutiny of her work, and looked around, she started to discover that it was the princess who was seated at the easel next her own, and was looking full at her. As Martha, confused and delighted, encountered that gaze, the beautiful lady's lips parted in a friendly smile, and she whispered gently,

"Bon jour."

Martha crimsoned with pleasure as she returned the greeting, and then both fell to work again. The princess was painting, laying on her color in a broad and daring style that almost frightened her neighbor. Martha watched her furtively while she crumbled her bread, and pretended to be erasing and touching up certain points in her picture. It was a bewildering delight to her to stand so close to the princess and see her at work, and she was agreeably aware that the princess was also aware of her, and perhaps even pleased at their being together.

When the time came for the model to rest, and the quiet of the room was a little relieved by the whispered talk that sprang up among the students as they waited, Martha felt that the princess had inclined toward her a little, and was looking at her work. She put down as childish the impulse that rushed up in her to cover the picture from sight, or to say how bad she knew it was, and she stood very still and very much embarrassed until the princess said again, in that exquisite utterance of French subtleties,

"C'est bien difficile, n'est-ce pas?"

Martha answered her somehow—she never knew what.

When the model came back, and they began to work again, she felt that she had become part of a wonderful experience. She had never seen the princess talking to any one else, and, amazing and undeserved as the tribute was, she could not be mistaken in thinking that the lovely lady wished to know her, and perhaps to allow her the dear privilege of such intercourse as their atelier life permitted. She never expected it to go beyond that; but that was far more than anything she had imagined.

Across one corner of her canvas Martha's name was scrawled in full, and she knew that the princess must have seen it. She looked to see if there was any signature upon the princess's picture, and, as if interpreting her thought, her neighbor, with a brilliant smile, dipped her brush in vermilion, and wrote in a bold, strong hand the word "Sonia." This name (which Martha did not know to be the Russian abbreviation of Sophia) seemed to the girl very odd and beautiful, and peculiarly appropriate to its possessor.

II

MARTHA said nothing to her mother and sisters of her encounter with the princess. She had a way of locking very close in her heart her most personal and sacred feelings, and all that related to the princess was sacred to her now. During her earlier years she had so often been laughed at for an enthusiast that she had learned to keep back what she felt most strongly; and for that very reason, perhaps, the intensity of her feelings grew greater as she grew older. The enthusiasm of her life was for her only brother, whom she worshiped with a blind idolatry of the extent of which even he was unaware. There had been one or two other divinities in her horizon, always second to Harold; but at this period of her life she was suffering from a sense of disappointment in these as, one after the other, they had come short of her ardent expectations. She was now, therefore, in the exact state of

mind to take on a new object of worship. This the princess had become.

It was not surprising that Martha's ideal had been so repeatedly unrealized, for it was a difficult one. She had suffered acutely from her former disappointments, and had even resolved never to pin her faith and hope on another woman. But the princess was not to be resisted. Martha felt that even if her goddess never spoke to her again, she was worthy of all adoration.

As the young girl drove through the streets of Paris in the early morning of the day following her brief interview with the princess, her heart was very happy.

In appearance Martha was small and rather plain ; and no one would have noticed her, perhaps, but for the concentration of expression on her face as she looked out of the carriage window on her way to her atelier in the Latin Quarter. The people abroad at that hour were not of a class to pay much attention to such a look on a girl's face. The little army of street-cleaners, occupying their brief hour with busy industry to produce the beautiful effect of gay cleanliness which the world enjoyed later in the day, had no time to notice Martha, and

she was as unaware of them. Even the ice on the figures in the fountains of the Place de la Concorde, which she generally admired in passing, she did not so much as see to-day. The "cold sea-maidens" wore an unusually beautiful veil of mist, made by the freezing spray, and Martha might have got an impression for some future picture if she had studied it with the early sunlight on it.

But she was thinking only of the princess as she drove along and crossed the bridge and entered old Paris. Here, too, all was familiar, for Martha had taken this drive daily for months, and there was nothing to disturb her preoccupation until she reached the Invalides, where her hero-worshipping soul never failed to offer a passing tribute of awe to the ashes of Napoleon.

As she turned into a cross street farther on, a little funeral procession met her. This sight, too, was familiar; but no wont and usage could keep Martha from being deeply moved as often as she witnessed the pitiful little ceremonial which attends the burial of the very poor in Paris.

It is usually in the early morning that these funerals occur, as there seems to be a

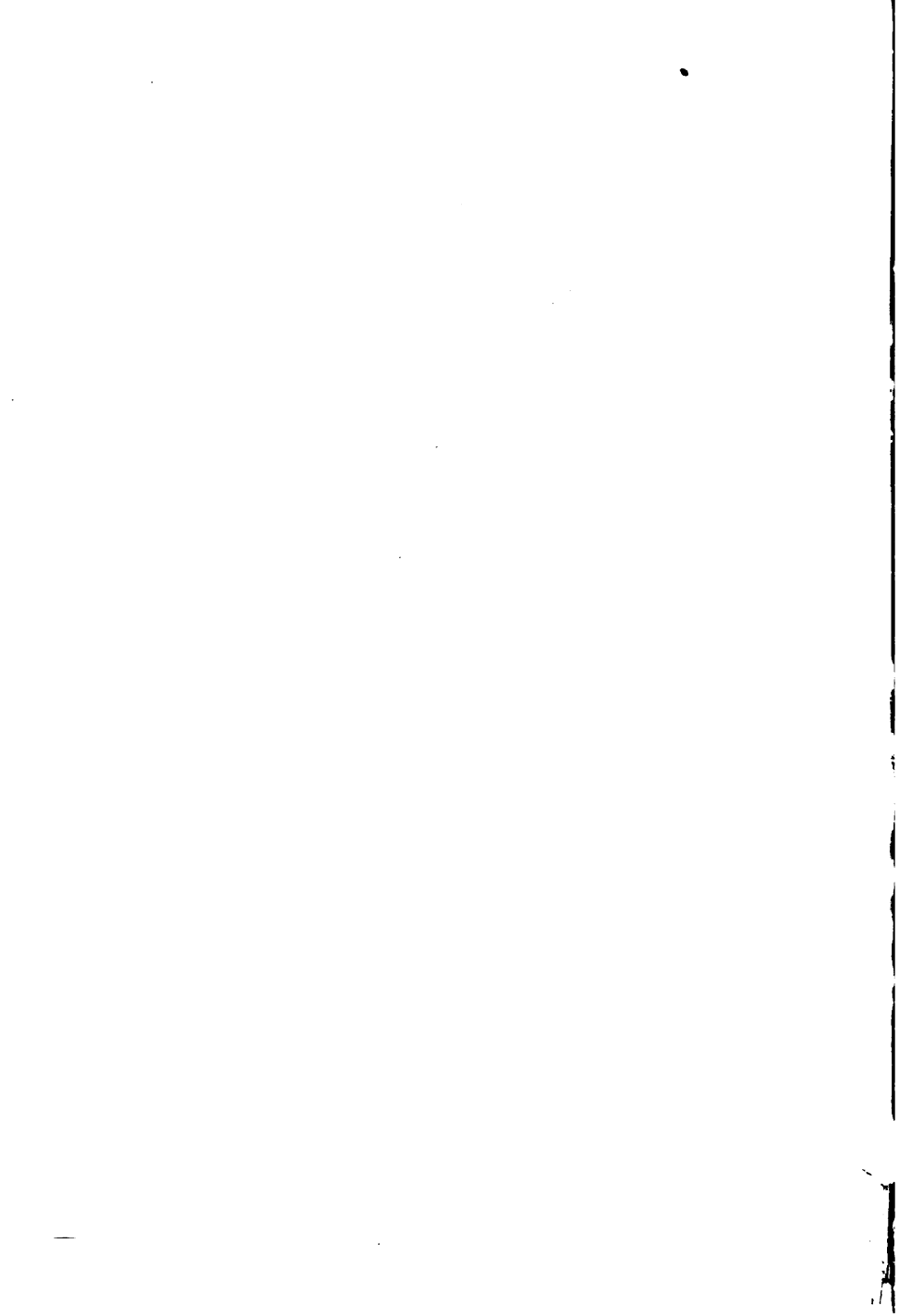
demand upon the poor to give up to the more prosperous even the space in the streets which they, with their dead, lay claim to for so short a time. This was a child's funeral, or, rather, it was the funeral of two children. There was neither hearse nor carriage. Each little coffin was borne upon a wretched bier carried by rough and shabby men, who appeared cross and reluctant in their miserable, faded trappings of mourning. Looking carefully, Martha discovered that there was a separate family of mourners to each little bier; and as the whole procession was under the command of a tall old man, who held his shoulders very erect, as if to atone for a limp in one leg, she comprehended that this bedizened old undertaker, with the ragged crape on his cocked hat and the dirty bunches of black and white ribbons on the end of his long staff of office, had consolidated his duties, probably at a slight and very welcome discount to his poor patrons, and was burying the dead of two families at once. Directly after him came the bearers of the light coffin, and just behind it were five little children, four girls and a boy, walking abreast, and dressed in mourning. This mourning con-

sisted of hastily fashioned aprons made of dull black calico, and so carelessly fitted that the many-colored undergarments of the children showed plainly at every opening. The children were regular little steps, the boy being the youngest; and cold as it was, they were all bareheaded. Each carried a sprig of yellow bloom, which resembled, if indeed it was not, the mustard-flower. This they held very stiffly and correctly in their right hands, and they walked with an air of the utmost decorum. Behind them came their father and mother, the former looking more apathetic than sad, and the latter carrying with some complacency the dignity of a dingy and dragged crape veil, in frank contrast to a blue-and-green plaid dress. She was taller than her husband, and leaned awkwardly upon his arm, keeping no time whatever to his shuffling gait. Then came the other coffin and the second group of mourners, who were evidently not so fashionable as the first; for they made no effort at mourning, and walked after their little dead one with nothing like a flower, and in their common working-clothes.

While Martha's carriage was passing this



"A TALL OLD MAN."



procession, she saw on the other side of them, going in the same direction with her, a smart turnout in which a gentleman was driving, with a groom behind. The horses shone like satin, and their harness jingled and glittered in the morning sunshine. The gentleman and his servant were dressed with a brilliant effect of care and detail. The former was smoking a cigarette, and had a scarlet flower in his coat.

As the little funeral procession passed this carriage, the young swell who was driving bared his head, with its smoothly parted blond hair, remaining uncovered until the procession had passed, his servant imitating his act. This little tribute of hom  ge to death which the French take the pains to perform always touched and pleased Martha. She thought of the absurdity of this man's uncovering his head to that pauper baby alive; but the mystery of death imparted to it a majesty which the equal mystery of life could not. This child was a partaker of the knowledge of the unknown, into which Napoleon, lying near by, had also entered, and was, with him, divided from the merely mortal.

Martha thought of this as she watched the showy carriage, which had relaxed its speed

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for a moment, whirling rapidly away toward the outskirts of the city. She wondered where that handsome, prosperous-looking, well-bred man was going at this early hour. Probably to fight a duel, she thought, in her romantic way! Perhaps in a few hours' time he might be as dead as the poor little baby; and perhaps there was some one who loved and adored him as she did Harold!

These were the ideas which filled her mind as she reached the atelier, there to learn that there was a disappointment about the model, who had failed to come.

She was about to take off her wraps, and go to work on some drawings from casts, when an exquisite voice behind her said suddenly, "Pardon, mademoiselle," and she turned to meet the gaze of the princess fixed upon her with a smile of lovely friendliness.

"What are you going to do?" she said in that faultless French which Martha had already admired.

For a moment the girl was quite overcome at such unexpected graciousness. Then she managed to say in her own faulty though perfectly fluent French, that she had thought she would go on and do what she could without a model.

"It is so dull, after having that glorious Antonio to pose for one," said the princess. "I am not in the humor, and my carriage is gone. Yours, perhaps, is gone also. Do you feel like drawing to-day? Or do you, perhaps, feel more like calling a cab, and taking a drive with me? I should like it. Will you go?"

Martha crimsoned with pleasure as she accepted the invitation. There was no mistaking her delight at the suggestion.

"You are very good to go," said the other, "especially as you know nothing of me, I suppose."

"I know only that you are the princess—the Russian princess," said Martha.

Her companion frowned slightly, and, Martha thought, looked a little annoyed. She reflected that she ought not, perhaps, to have told her that her secret had been discovered.

The little frown soon passed, however, and the princess smiled genially as she said:

"I am living incognito in Paris to study painting, and I do not go into the world. When I am not working I am often bored, and I frequently long for companionship. You make me very grateful by giving me yours this morning."

The princess was very tall—so tall that when Martha walked at her side she had to turn her face upward to speak to her. They walked along in the most natural companionship until they reached a cab-stand near by, and Martha thought her divinity more worshipful than ever as she stood wrapped in her long cloak, with a large, black-plumed hat crowning her beautiful head, and said some words of gentle pity about the poor old, weak-kneed cab-horses drawn up in a line.

When they had entered a cab, and were seated side by side, the princess said abruptly :

“If you had not heard something of me, I should have told you nothing. Why should we ask questions about each other? We meet to-day, art students in a Paris atelier, and we shall part to-morrow. What have we to do with formalities? Of you I know that you are a young American studying painting here, and I think, in a way, sympathetic to me. I am content to know that, and no more, of you. Do you feel the same about me?”

Martha replied eagerly in the affirmative, and in five minutes the two had come to a perfect understanding. The girl felt her awe at being in “the presence” gradually fading away,



"THE PRINCESS WAS VERY TALL"

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as this winning young woman sat and talked with her on a footing of friendly equality. It was after a short silence between them that the princess said:

“There are one or two things that it will be necessary for you to know—that is, if you like me well enough to come to see me, as I hope you do. I am living in the Rue Presbourg, and when you come to see me, you are to ask for the apartment of the Princess Manner-norff. You will come, will you not?”

“Oh, if you will only let me, it will be my greatest happiness!” said Martha. “I can’t understand what has made you so good to me!”

“Simply, I like you. It is n’t hard to understand. I’ve noticed you a long time, and I’ve liked you more and more. I like your manner; I like your face; I like your devotion to your work; and I like your work.”

“My work! My scratching and smudging, you mean! Oh, how *can* you notice it or care for it when you look at yours? Every one must see that Etienne knows that you are his best pupil. He does not speak to any one as he does to you, and you must know as well as I that it is not because you are a princess.”

"Yes, of course; I know that perfectly well. But I fancy that Etienne, in his little critical heart, feels that he has n't got out of me what he looked for at first. At least, I have that idea; and you see I have studied enough, compared with you, to be a great deal further ahead of you than I am. I have digged and delved for that treasure more than you realize. I hope to do something tolerable some day; but I'm not as confident about it as I used to be, and I fear Etienne is not, either. Oh, I *wish* I could!"

She said this with such fervor, and followed it by such a wistful sigh, that Martha, who had not yet taken in the idea that the princess might not be the all-fortunate creature she imagined, felt a sudden protest against the thought of her wishing for anything vainly.

"Surely you will!" she said. "I can't imagine your wanting anything very much without getting it."

The princess laughed, throwing up her chin, and looking at Martha with an indulgent smile.

"You can't?" she exclaimed. "Well, if you take the trouble to continue my acquaintance, you will find that I've missed pretty much

everything in life that I very greatly wanted. It is sad, but true."

Martha did not answer, but she looked as if she would like to speak out something that was on her mind, and her companion saw this, and said:

"What is it? Speak! I give you full permission."

"It was nothing," said Martha, rather confusedly. "I was wondering about you—as, of course, I can't help doing. I don't want to be told things, however. I would far rather imagine how they are."

"Very, very sensible. I see that I shall like you more and more. There are a few things, however, which it will be well for you to know. For instance," — she paused, with a slight look of reluctance, and then went on rapidly, — "no doubt you wonder whether I am married."

Martha's eyes confirmed her.

A cloud seemed to have settled with surprising suddenness upon the face of the princess. She looked fixedly at the passing prospect outside the window as, after a moment of difficult silence, she said almost brusquely:

"I am a widow." Then she turned and looked at Martha. "You will understand, for

the future," she went on more naturally, "my wish for silence on this subject. I am living temporarily in Paris with my aunt. I used to know French society well, but I am out of it now, and I don't regret it. Painting is the only thing I really care for—that, and music, and some books; some, but not many. Books give such false ideas of life. I think it was what I read in books that led me to expect so much. I was not to be convinced but that all the happiness I imagined was quite possible; and when it would not come to me, I thought there was a force in me which could compel it. As a rule, I've given that idea up; but there are times even yet when it rises and conquers me. I know it is very foolish, and that experience cures one of such feelings, but I'm not altogether cured yet, in spite of hard and repeated blows."

Martha had listened with intense interest, and now, as her companion paused, she felt that she ought to volunteer, on her part, some sort of sketch of herself and her surroundings.

"I don't care to tell you anything about myself," she said, "because it's so uninteresting. My father has been dead a great many years; mama is delicate; and we live in Paris

so that I may study painting and the younger girls may have lessons. We go to America for the summers. My brother is the eldest of us, and he lives there. The younger girls are pretty, and mama wishes them to go into society and to be admired. She used also to wish this for me, but she saw how I hated it, and how little chance I had in it, so she lets me alone now, particularly since I got Harold to speak to her."

"Are you sure that she would not disapprove of your friendship with me, knowing of me only the little that you are able to tell her?"

"Yes; I'm certain of it. She would n't mind. She knows I never get into mischief. I feel perfectly free to do as I choose about this, and I don't mean to mention you to any one—not because there would be any objection, but because you are too sacred to me, and if you let me be your friend, I can't share that knowledge and possession with any one."

Martha was determined to say this, but she did not accomplish it without a good deal of hesitation and embarrassment. Her companion looked at her with a sort of wondering scrutiny.

"Where do you get that earnest, concentrated nature, I wonder — so different from mine!" she said. "Does it go with the American character? Your words are very foolish, child; but it is so long since any one has held me sacred that I am ridiculously touched by it."

There was something that looked like rising tears in the beautiful eyes of the princess; but a gay little laugh soon banished the shadow from both her face and her voice. Suddenly she sat upright and said:

"Suppose you come home with me now! I want you to learn the ways of the place, so that you may come and go as you please. Will you come with me there to-day?"

Martha agreed at once, and with evident satisfaction the princess leaned out of the window, and gave the address to the cabman.

III

MARTHA felt herself in a dream of delight as she descended from the cab, and, following the princess into the courtyard of a large apartment-house in the Rue Presbourg, mounted the stairs at her side.

Their ring was answered by a foreign-looking man-servant, to whom the princess spoke in a tongue which Martha recognized as Russian, but of which she understood not a word. She saw, however, that it related to herself; for the servant, who wore a curious and elaborate livery, looked at her and bowed.

"I have been telling him," explained the princess, "that whenever you come you are to be brought at once to my private sitting-room, whether I am at home to other people or not. If it should chance that I cannot see you,—an unlikely thing, for I generally do what I want, and I shall always want to see you,—my maid can bring you word there. You see,

I am not going to take any risk of having you turned away from my door."

The antechamber into which they had been admitted was charmingly furnished, not at all in the French style; and there was something in the whole environment of the princess which commended itself strongly to Martha's artistic taste. Everything that she saw, as she passed along, deepened this impression. She followed her companion in excited silence through the antechamber, and into the large and sunny salon, where two persons were sitting.

One was a little old lady with very white hair, elaborately arranged under a queer-looking lace cap fastened with jeweled pins; the other was a dark and severely dressed woman, who, Martha at once saw, was a sort of companion or maid. As the princess approached, this woman rose and courtesied. The old lady looked up, with some surprise in her placid face, and immediately laid down her embroidery, and took up a silver ear-trumpet, holding out her other hand to the princess.

The latter bent, and kissed the proffered fingers lightly, and then, raising her voice a little, uttered several sentences in Russian

into the trumpet, at the same time indicating Martha in a way that made her understand that this was an introduction. The girl also bent, and kissed the hand now extended to her, and then the princess led her away.

"My poor aunt is so deaf," she said, "that it is almost impossible to talk to her, and I could not go into any long explanation about you. She never interferes with me, however, and no questions will be asked. Come now to my own room."

Martha, following her companion, found herself in a small boudoir opening into a bedroom. The door of the latter was open, and the two apartments gave an impression which she told herself she could best describe by the word lovable. The musical instruments stood open. The lounges and chairs seemed to have taken the shapes of their occupants. Flowers that looked as if they had been willingly plucked were all about in vases. Well-worn volumes and drawing-books were scattered about, and some of the princess's atelier studies were placed against the walls on the floor. Martha, who could hardly believe in her good fortune in having received even the smallest notice from the

princess, was yet more bewildered and delighted when the latter crossed the little *boudoir*, and led her into the bedroom.

Here the French maid whom Martha had seen at the atelier sat sewing. She stood up, evidently surprised. As she courtesied, and came forward to take her lady's wraps, the latter hastily threw her cloak to her, and then, striking her hands together with a quick little clap, said:

"Va-t'en, Félicie!"

The maid smiled. She and her mistress evidently understood each other well. Deftly gathering up her work, she left the room, and Martha found herself alone with her divinity, in the privacy of her own bedroom. She felt quite foolishly happy. Perhaps the princess saw it, for she said, with her bewildering smile:

"You like it, do you not? You need n't explain. I see you do, just as I saw that you liked me, without your saying a word. I am so glad."

"*Like* you!" said Martha, protestingly. "Oh!"

Then the princess came and stood in front of the young girl, and put her arms around



“IT WILL BE QUITE SAFE, I SEE.”

her neck, clasping her long hands at the back, and looking down at her.

"It will be quite safe, I see," she said, still smiling, "for me to make my confession to you, and own that I was drawn to you in quite an extraordinary way. I really did not mean to go so fast, however; and if I had stopped to think, I should probably not have proposed to you to take this drive with me. But for once I am glad that I did not stop to think. My impetuosity is generally my bane in everything. This time I feel that it has brought me a blessing. I can prove to you that it is not my habit to go out to strangers in this way by the fact that I am so friendless. I have no intimate friend in Paris, though I know scores of people here. If I like you, and want to see more of you, and you have the same feeling toward me, why should we not indulge ourselves? Very well! So we will!" and she bent, and kissed Martha on the cheek.

The girl's heart quivered with joy; but she could find no words in which to express it, so she was quite silent. She felt herself very stupid as she let the princess take off her wraps and hat, and lead her to a seat.

"Now," said the lovely lady, "as I am one of those people who must be comfortable before they can be happy, I am going to put on a loose gown. No excuses necessary, I know."

She disappeared for a moment, and came back in an exquisite garment of pale-blue silk with borderings of dark fur. She had seemed to Martha very splendid and beautiful before, but now she was so winning, so sweet, so adorable, that the young girl felt her whole heart glow with delight as, with a long-drawn sigh of ease, the princess threw herself on the lounge at her side.

"Now," she said, as her hand closed on Martha's, "talk to me."

Poor Martha! What could she say? Her gratefulness for this unexpected confidence and friendliness moved her almost to tears, but she was silent.

"Talk to me, Martha," said the princess, coaxingly. "I may call you that, may I not?"

She called it "Mart'a," with her pretty foreign utterance; and Martha thought her homely name had suddenly become adorable. But she could not even tell this to

the princess. How dull and stupid she was! Her consent must have shown itself in her eyes, however, for the princess went on:

"I can't call you Martha unless you call me by my name, too. Will you? I have a fancy to hear you say it now. Will you call me by my little Russian name—Sonia?"

It was evident that the girl's silence did not offend her. She must have understood its basis, for she said, with an encouraging smile:

"Say it. Say 'Sonia.'"

"Oh, you are too good to me!" exclaimed Martha. "You spoke of knowing that I liked you. I don't *like* you—I *love* you! I don't *love* you—I *adore* you! O *Sonia!*" and the girl actually slipped from the low chair to her knees beside the lounge.

The princess jumped to her feet, and with strong hands lifted Martha to hers; then holding both the girl's hands, and stretching her arms apart to their full length, as their two faces were drawn together thus, she kissed Martha with affectionate warmth.

"What a dear thing you are!" she said. "How good it is to see some one who can really feel! How tired one gets of the *fin-de-siècle* spirit in both women and men!

Bless you, my Martha! You have come to be a great joy in my life. I feel that we are going to be friends for always—do you?”

“Oh, if you will let me! If you will only not be disappointed in me! I am afraid to speak, afraid to breathe almost, for fear that you will find out that I am only a poor, commonplace little creature, in whom your goodness has made you see something which does not exist. Oh, I *pray* I may not disappoint you! And yet how can I dare to hope?”

“Listen, Martha,” said the princess in a matter-of-fact tone, as she drew the other down to a seat beside her on the lounge; “let us take each other quite simply, and not promise anything. We will just agree to be perfectly natural with each other—just to be ourselves. If you continue to like me, and I you, it is all right. If not, we shall have broken no pledges and done each other no wrong. Now, with that basis to go upon, we can both feel natural and satisfied. Only don’t cover up your real self to me, for you may be concealing just what I love, and pretending what I hate. It is because you are different from others that I have been so

drawn to you. Now don't try to be like other people, and ruin everything."

"Oh, I feel I can be myself with you. I feel I can tell you everything that is in my heart, and talk of things that I have never been able to speak of to others. How beautiful it is! How strange that such a relationship between two women can come about here in Paris in this age of the world!"

"It could not if we were Parisians; but both of us being foreign to this atmosphere, it can. I love your being an American. I felt sure you were even before I asked Etienne."

"And did he tell you? I have always understood that he never answered questions about his students."

"So have I; but I asked him all the same, and he told me who you were. I had quite fancied you before, and after that I fancied you still more, as I love the ideal of the American, a creature newer from Nature's hands, and nearer to her heart, than we of the Old World; and, fortunately or otherwise, I have known too few of your people either to confirm or contradict this idea. So now I think I shall go on liking you. And how is it with

you? Do you think you will not be disappointed in me?"

Her beautiful lips widened in a smile of broad amusement that made her eyes twinkle. Martha looked at her with a speechless adoration which she could not have been so dense as to misunderstand.

"How delightful!" said the princess. "It has been so long since I have permitted myself the luxury of a friend that my appetite for one is all the keener."

She had thrown herself back on the lounge, and as Martha sat down by her, the princess again took her hand, saying as she did so:

"Now I will tell you two things about myself at the outset of our acquaintance: one is that I love to ask questions; the other is that I hate to be questioned. Will you remember these facts, and will you be as frank with me if I do what you don't like? I am very nearly certain that we shall get on together admirably, for the reason that I know you have no vulgar curiosity about me or my affairs. You have sense enough to be convinced by one look at my aunt, if there were nothing else, that I am respectable. Now I am pretty confident that you have an impulse to talk

out freely to me, and to answer any questions that I may choose to put—all the more



““AH, I HAVE MADE A MISTAKE, I SEE.””

so because your general habit is one of strict reserve.”

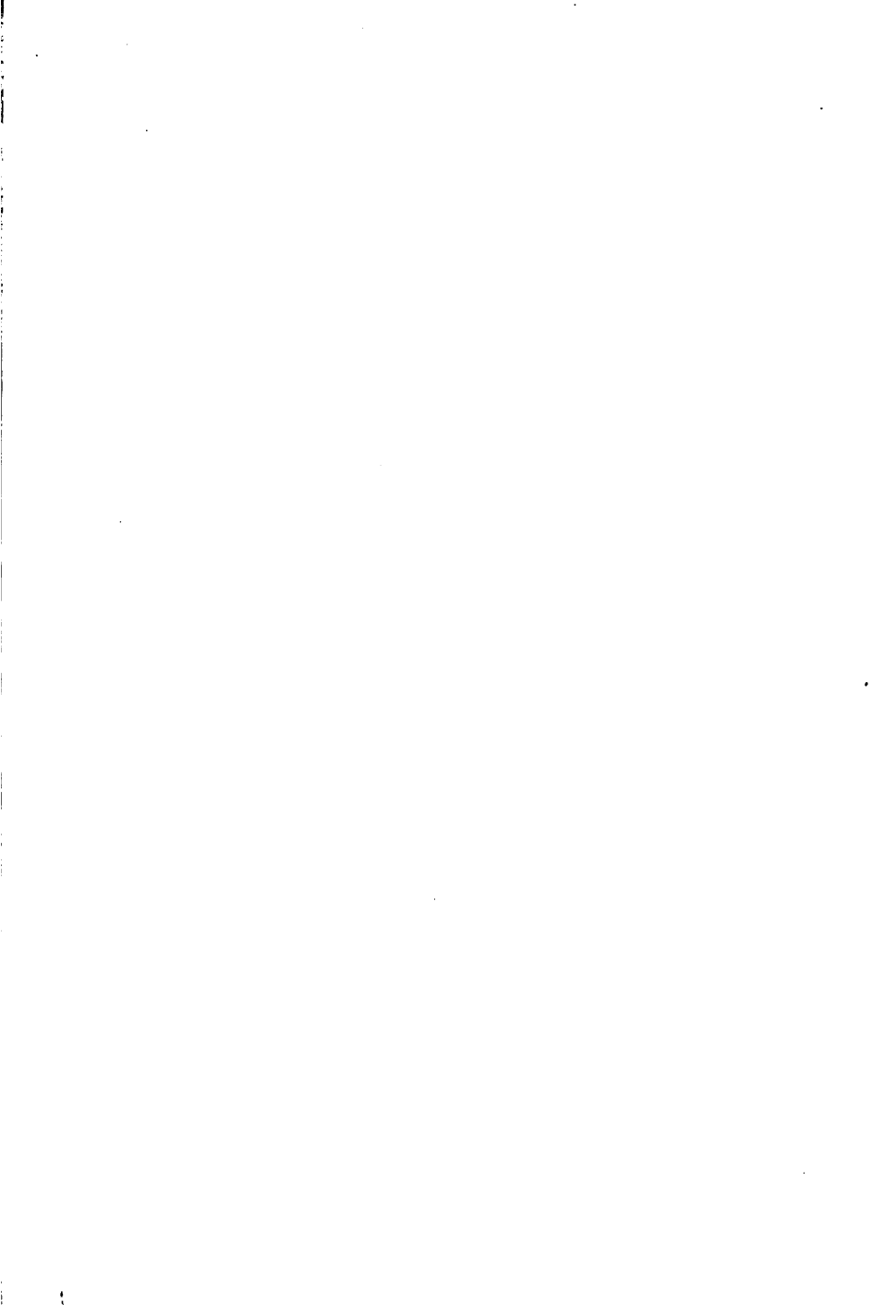
The princess kept her eye on her companion's face while she was talking, and she could tell by its expression that she had interpreted her correctly. She said so, with a little laugh of contentment, and then added :

“Tell me about yourself first of all.”

Martha's countenance fell.

"Ah, I have made a mistake, I see," said the princess. "We have not come to that yet; but we will come to it — you and I. Some of these days you will find yourself telling me all those close-locked secrets of your heart; and yet even they, I fancy, will relate more to others than to yourself. So be it! I can wait. Tell me now about your people — your family here in Paris."

"Well," began Martha, "there are mama and we four girls — Alice, Marian, Florence, and I. Alice is very handsome, and poor mama has had to shift over to her and to the younger girls, who also bid fair to be charming, all the hopes which she once centered in me. I have been struggled with for years, and finally let alone. Mama agrees to my working at my painting because she has made up her mind that unless I amount to something in that I shall never amount to anything at all; but I don't think she has much hope of me. She is not far from beautiful herself, and is accustomed to being admired, and it took her a long time to accept my indifference to it. However, it's quite accepted now; and I even think that, with three other girls to be taken into society, she finds a certain relief in leav-





"ALICE HAS A FINE VOICE."

ing me out of it. The other girls are studying music and languages. Alice has a fine voice."

"And your father is dead, is he not? Did you not say you had a brother?"

Martha's face grew quite white with the concentration of mind which this thought produced.

"Yes; I have a brother," she said.

"Forgive me," said the princess, with swift sympathy. "There is evidently some reason why it pains you to speak of your brother. Forget that I asked you."

The blood rushed to Martha's face as it occurred to her that her companion might misunderstand her reluctance to speak on this subject.

"It's not that I am not proud of him that it is hard for me to speak," she said; "it's expressly because I am. I made up my mind long ago not to talk about Harold. I found I must not, because I could not speak of him with any freedom without saying things that people would think no merely mortal man deserved. I have worshiped him all my life, and, as I'm rather ashamed to own, I've had a great many other idols which turned out

to be made of clay. This one, however, has never proved for an instant unworthy of my adoration."

The princess smiled.

"One would like to get a look at him," she said. "An absolutely faultless being must be interesting to look at."

"Don't laugh at me!" cried Martha. "If it were any one but you I could not bear it; but I know you would say or do nothing that could hurt me really. I don't wish you to understand that I think Harold faultless. He is not. But to one who understands him as I do, his very faults are part of his greatness. They all have their seat in something noble, and to see how he fights to conquer them is a thing that thrills me. He is now off in America hard at work. He has done some quite extraordinary things in electricity, and is absorbed in his career. When I am a little older, and mama gives me up as a hopeless job for society, I am to go and live with Harold, and keep house for him. That is my dream and his."

"Sooner or later, dear child, you will have to wake from that dream. I do not find it as unlikely as you seem to that you will marry;

and even if you should not, your brother probably will."

The princess was smiling, but her smile faded at the look of tragic pain in her companion's face. She could see that the young girl had been touched in her heart's tenderest place.

"No," she said, with that frown of sadness unrelaxed, "he will never marry."

"Forgive me again, dear Martha," said the princess. "Your brother has had some disappointment, about which your heart is as sensitive as his own. I see that, and you need tell me no more. It is good that he has you to comprehend and sympathize with him. It is good that you have each other. If you gave your heart and life to a husband as wholly as you have given them to your brother, he would probably break the heart and wreck the life, and even the right to dream would be taken from you. Living with this brother, whom you love and worship so, whether he deserves it or not, you may have many a sweet and joy-giving dream which no reality would equal. I wish I could make you see how fortunate you are."

"I care very little for my own happiness,"

said Martha, too absorbed to realize that she was saying anything that called for comment. "All that I care for is to give Harold a little comfort and calm. He can never be happy again."

"He tells you so, dear child, and no doubt he believes it. I tell you it will pass. Men do not grieve perpetually for women. I know them better than you do."

"You do not know this man. If you imagine that he is like any other man in the world, you are wrong. He could not get over this sorrow and be the man that he is. It is simply a thing impossible to him. Not that he shows it! It has been two years since it happened, and no doubt every one except myself thinks he has recovered. I dare say he wants to have it so, and he's generally cheerful and bright. Even to me he never says a word, but I think he knows that I understand. At all events, he knows that, though it is the desire of my life to go and live with him, I would never do him the wrong to suppose that I could make him happy."

"He has, then, it would seem, the same ardent temperament as yours. Dear me! how odd it would be to see a man like that in this



IN THE AMERICAN COLONY.

generation! Was this woman very cruel to him that you resent it so?"

"Resent it!" said Martha, dropping her companion's hand, to clasp her own hands together. "Even to you I can't talk about that. I should either cry like a fool or rage like a fury. I know very little about what happened, except that she has utterly ruined Harold's life, and cut him off from everything that makes life sweet."

"You allow yourself to suffer too much for him, perhaps," the princess said. "I am not going to antagonize you at the outset by saying all that I might say to you on this subject, but believe me, my little *ingénue*, I could give you points about men. I will not do it now, however, and I will even show my willingness to spare you by changing the subject. Tell me about Alice. Is she really so handsome? Does she go into society? Where could one see her?"

"Yes; she goes out a good deal — in the American colony, principally. I don't think there is any doubt that she's handsome."

"Then I'm all the more unfortunate in having no acquaintance in the American colony. Does she look like you?"

"No; the fact is —" Martha blushed, and was in evident confusion, as she went on — "the fact is, I'm considered like Harold. Not really, you know, because no one can deny that he's magnificent; but there's said to be a sort of family likeness."

"Well, I can believe that, my dear, without absolute insult to your brother. Is Alice much admired?"

"Yes, a good deal; but she's engaged now, and so she is not noticed as much as she was."

"Oh, she's engaged, is she? And when is she to be married?"

"The day is not fixed, but it will be before long. The trousseau is being bought now. Her fiancé is an Italian officer of very good family, though not much fortune. Still, Alice is happy, and mama is satisfied, and Harold has given his consent. He is coming over to the wedding. Oh, if you could see him — and he could see you!"

"His seeing me is wholly unnecessary; but the other part might be accomplished. It would be a good idea to give me a card to the wedding if it takes place in a church. Then I could see all your people without their seeing me, and probably disapproving of our intimacy

and breaking it up—or else putting it on a footing that would have no comfort in it.”

“How *could* they disapprove?” said Martha, deeply hurt. “How could they be anything but honored that I should be noticed at all by a great princess like you?”

“Oh, there’s no greatness about this princess, child,” said the other, laughing. “Don’t expect to see me going around with a throne to sit on, in either a literal or a figurative sense. To you I am only Sonia—a fact which you seem to have forgotten, by the way! I wish you’d call me Sonia, and stop thinking about the princess. With your American ideas it, no doubt, seems much more important than it is. Are you going to tell your people about me really or not?”

“No,” said Martha; “I would n’t for the world. It may be selfish, but I want you all to myself.”

This was perfectly true; but at the same time, ignore it as she might, there was a lurking feeling in Martha’s heart that the princess was right in imagining that if her mother knew of the friendship that had sprung up between the two students at Etienne’s, she might insist upon investigating the princess

—an indignity which Martha felt that she could not endure.

The princess herself seemed pleased at Martha's evident wish to monopolize her; and the two parted at last with the confidence and affection of old friends.

IV

THE days at the atelier had now a new interest for both students, and their work was manifestly the better for it. To Martha these days were filled with a glorious delight, which seemed to give her all that her nature craved; and if it had not been for sad thoughts of her brother and his loneliness, she would have felt that she could ask for nothing.

To have the princess painting near her, and to be able to look up and see her beautiful figure, with its sinuous grace, posed before her easel, and to receive from her now and then a brilliant smile of mutual comprehension, was quite enough of personal bliss for Martha Keene.

Martha had an ardent and romantic temperament, but she seemed to be capable of satisfying its needs vicariously. There undoubtedly are such women, though the like has possibly never existed in the other sex.

For instance, it was a continual battle with her now to put down the temptation, which constantly assailed her, of imagining a meeting, an attraction, and finally a union between the brother who realized her romantic ideal of man and the friend who realized his complement in woman's form. She knew it was impossible. She knew that Harold would never marry; and she even realized that if he could love again, after the manner in which he had loved one woman, he would, by that fact, compel her to lower her standard either of love or of him.

And yet Martha felt that the meeting and blending of these two lives would, if she could have seen it, have satisfied every need of her heart. She believed that her pleasure and contentment in looking on at such a union as this would give her the greatest joy that could be for her—would indeed, in a way, give her the feeling of satisfied love.

It was very hard to put down these imaginings; but she told herself that it must be done. Harold's life and love had been given once, and she knew he was right in saying that they were not his to give again; and on the princess's part, no doubt the idea would

be a wild suggestion, indeed. Martha did not know what rigid laws of etiquette and convention might not bind the princess; and condescending as the latter had chosen to be with regard to herself, she felt that this beautiful lady would never do anything unworthy of her caste. Her husband, whether she had loved him or not, had no doubt been a great prince, whose name and title the woman on whom he had bestowed them would never consent to debase. The thing was hopeless and wrong, of course, and the idea must be put away from her. But it was hard to do, with her hero constantly in her mind, and her heroine constantly before her eyes.

One day, after an unusually hard morning's work, the princess invited Martha to go home to lunch with her, and to spend the afternoon at the Louvre, looking together at the pictures which they had so often enjoyed apart.

When they reached the apartment in the Rue Presbourg, the princess was informed that her aunt had already finished her second breakfast, which she took with the regularity of clockwork, not depending upon the comings and goings of the rather erratic

person who was the other member of the family. This the princess explained lightly, as she led the way to the dining-room. The servants by this time all knew Martha; and they looked upon her, as the friend of their mistress, with the most amiable glances. Not speaking the Russian language, Martha could show her good will only by a pleasant smile, in return for the evident pleasure which they showed in serving her.

The princess threw her wrap backward over the chair, as she sat at the head of the round table, with her slender figure against a background of dark sable, and her head, in its large plumed hat, standing out from a halo of many-hued old stained-glass in the window behind. Martha, sitting opposite, fell into an unconsciously intent scrutiny of her face.

It was certainly safe, Martha thought, to call this face beautiful, both for feature and character. The eyes were large, dark, brilliant, and fervidly suggestive. One wondered what those eyes had seen, were seeing, and were capable of discovering for others. The hair was a brilliant, waving brown, arranged in a loose mass that was still firm and lovely in its outline—hair, as Martha thought, that



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"HER HEAD, IN ITS LARGE PLUMED HAT."

Mr. U

it must be sweet to touch with fingers and with lips. Also the girl thought one might well long to prove by touch whether that white skin was as smooth and fine as it looked. The firm, short nose was definitely pointed, and tilted upward, slightly lifting with it the short upper lip. Her chin was bewitching—at once strong and alluring. The mouth was very individual, and, as Martha studied it, she concluded that if she could tell why it was so charming, half the charm would be gone. For the first time it occurred to her to wonder how old the princess was.

“You are wondering how old I am!” said the princess, almost taking the girl’s breath away.

“I never knew anything so strange!” exclaimed Martha. “It was the very thought I had in my mind.”

“Certainly, I read it there! I can do that, sometimes, with people who are very sympathetic to me. I fancy it would be rather dangerous for *you* to do any very private thinking in my presence. I sometimes read, too, without reading aloud. I think I have read some of your thoughts lately, without your suspecting it.”

She looked at Martha, over her cup of bouillon, and smiled. Martha felt herself blushing, as she wondered if that persistent and dominating thought about her brother, which had been so often in her mind of late, could have been perceived by this wonderful being. It frightened her so that she quickly changed the subject, and the remainder of the meal passed in less personal talk.

When they were seated in the princess's coupé, a little later, driving past the Arc de Triomphe, Martha saw her companion turning her head to look at it with lingering, earnest eyes.

"I always look at the Arc whenever I can," she said; "and it always has something to say to me. Its expression of strong beauty and repose always makes me feel that what is, is right. If I am happy, it makes me feel that joy is both good and permanent; and even when in times of unhappiness it makes me feel that sadness is permanent, it somehow seems to tell me that that too is good. Did you ever stand quite close to it and look up?"

"No," said Martha.

"We must, some day, together. It will give you a new sensation."

"I always thought that it appeared better at a distance," said Martha.

"So it does, in a way; but the impression is different. I love it from the Place de la Concorde, when the horse-chestnuts are in bloom. Then it looks like a magnificent image of beneficence, stretching out two great arms to take in all those people, in carriages and on foot, who are thronging the Champs-Élysées, its body vague and distant in the clouds. That's a sufficiently fantastic thought for you, if you like; but it is one that has comforted me. I love Paris. It is the only city that has ever seemed to me to be lovable. Its streets are so gay and clean, and the faces of the people one meets, along here at least, are so good-humored and intelligent. I love this mixture of fashion and ruralness. Look at the swells and the peasants driving side by side! Look at those white-aproned men drawing hand-carts, that mail-coach coming alongside, those old peasants in their covered wagons, and that superb mounted policeman with his gorgeous trappings! How friendly and at home they all seem! Even that omnibus, with its three white Percherons abreast, looks sociable and friendly by the side of the *steppeurs* of the

haute école. Oh, it's all very human and charming; or is it that you humanize me, and make me feel its charm more than I have done for many a day?"

She was still in this delightful humor when they reached the Louvre, and made their way at once to pay their homage to the Venus of Milo. They did not say much as they looked at her, moving slowly from place to place to get the different points of view. Each knew what the other felt, and words seemed out of place. Presently the princess said:

"I have a fancy to try an experiment. Let's name her! What I mean is, if that were a real woman, what would you think the name best suited to her?"

Martha smiled comprehendingly, and looked at the statue with a gaze of deep concentration. This changed, after a moment, into a smile, as she said:

"I've named her. It's so absurd, however," she went on, "to give such a name as I've chosen to that ancient Greek statue, that I'm almost ashamed to tell it."

"You need n't be," said the princess, smiling too; "for I've got a name about which I

have exactly the same feeling. Come ; I'll say mine first. It's Gloriana."

"And mine is Georgiana! How odd that they should be so much alike!"

"Is n't it? It's delightful, though; for it shows that there's something in my theory of names, and that this statue has made almost exactly the same impression on us. I'm eager now to name the Winged Victory. Come; let's go and look at her."

They hurried away to the foot of the wide staircase, where, looking up, they saw the magnificent creature with her great wings spread.

After standing before her in silence a few moments, the princess exclaimed suddenly:

"Oh, have you named her yet? A *perfect* name for her has come to me!"

"And to me, too—*perfect!*" said Martha.
"How many syllables has yours?"

"One."

"So has mine!" said the other, breathlessly.
"Now let's count three, and say the name."

Simultaneously they said: "One, two, three—*Ruth!*"

Then they looked at each other with an excited delight that the passers-by must have

thought rather amazing even for two artists looking at the Victory.

"It's the most wonderful thing I ever heard of," said Martha. "Don't you feel positively creepy?"

"I should think I did! Little cold chills are running all over me. Oh, how nice it is that we can think and feel together in this way!"

Her face, as she spoke, was glowingly beautiful; and Martha returned her gaze with a look which expressed what no words could possibly have done.

V

ONE morning the princess did not come to the atelier; and Martha, after working along without her for a while, thinking that her friend might have been delayed and hoping that she would come later, found her mind so preoccupied by the absence of her usual companion that her work would not go at all, and at last she concluded to stop trying, and to go to look the princess up.

She called a cab, and drove to the apartment in the Rue Presbourg, where she was now well known. Even the old concierge, with her shining white hair, brilliant black eyes, red cheeks, and bearded upper lip, gave her a smile of welcome as she passed through the court; and the princess's servant gave her another as he conducted her at once to his mistress's boudoir.

Here he left her. Martha tapped on the door, and waited. Getting no answer, she

turned the knob and entered, intending to knock at the inner door; but no sooner had she shut herself into the room than she became aware, although it was almost wholly darkened, that it was not unoccupied.

A stifled sound reached her ears, and she could now make out the figure of the princess, lying on the lounge, with her face buried in her hands.

The girl's heart ached with pity, and she did not know whether to yield to her own impulse, and to go forward, or to consult the possible preference of her friend, and go back.

While she hesitated, the princess took her hands from her face, and saw her. As she did so, she started up, touching her eyes with her handkerchief, and clearing her voice to speak.

"Is it you, Martha? Come in, child," she said. "I have a headache to-day, and intended to see no one. I forgot, however, that I had given orders that you were always to be the exception. I should not have let you see me like this if I had known beforehand; but now that you have looked upon your poor friend in this humiliated state, sit down, and never mind."



“IS IT YOU, MARTHA?”

Martha had come near, and now took the seat beside the lounge, her face tragic with sympathy.

"I am so sorry you are ill," was all that she could say.

"I am not ill, really," said the princess. She was lying back upon the lounge, and fanning her flushed face with her little gossamer handkerchief, which Martha could see was limp with tears. "My head does ache now, but I brought it on by this wretched crying. It's all my own fault. You did not know that I was such a weakling, did you?" and she made an effort to smile.

"Oh, I am so, so sorry!" said Martha, helplessly.

"You need n't be, dear. Never be sorry for any man or woman who is equal to his or her life—and I am equal to mine. One time out of ten it gets the better of me, but the nine times I get the better of it. This mood will surely pass. Indeed, it is passing now. You have helped me already. It has been very long indeed since I have found or wanted human help, and it takes me by surprise."

Martha saw that she was preparing to lead the talk away from her recent tears and their

cause, and she passionately wished that her friend should feel that she longed to enter into her sorrow with her, if it could be allowed her; so she said impulsively:

"I don't suppose you feel like telling me your trouble; but oh, I wish you could!"

"I do feel like it, you darling child! I could talk to you about it better than to any one on earth; but there are some things one cannot speak of even to one's own heart. That is the trouble now. If I were to let myself indulge freely in imaginings and regrets, I should satisfy the want of the moment, but it would undo me utterly. My great temptation is regret, and I must be strong enough not to regret."

"Oh, how sad life is!" cried Martha. "I have always thought that you at least ought to be happy. I gave you the name of 'The Happy Princess,' out of Tennyson. It has seemed to me from the first that you were a creature who had it in you to command happiness."

"Ah, dear child, if you could only know how helpless I am there! The best thing that is in me is the power to command courage. That I can, and for the most part do. While that is so, I shall not complain."

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“OH, I AM SO, SO SORRY.”

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"Then you are really unhappy? Oh!" said Martha, drawing herself up with an impulsive movement.

"I know what that fervent exclamation means as well as if you had put it into words," said the princess. "You are wishing that there were some way in which, by sacrificing yourself, you could purchase happiness for me."

Martha, startled at the correctness of this guess, could say nothing in denial.

"I knew it," said the princess, reading her face. "I have not the faintest doubt that you would do it; and—now I am going to knock over some of your idealizing of me—there have been moments in my life when my greed for happiness has consumed me so that I believe I would have been willing to take it, and to let another pay the price. That's a base thing for a woman to say of herself, but so true it is that I thank God I was never tempted when those moods were on me. Something not wholly different from that panting after an impossible joy was upon me this morning. Shall I never get the better of it utterly? *Can* one overcome it? Did *you* never have it, Martha? To me joy is im-

possible, but it is not so to you. Don't you ever long for it? I will speak to you quite openly, Martha, and tell you this—when I say joy, I mean love. *Is* there a woman's heart that does not long for that? Be as honest with me as I have been with you, and tell me."

"I will try," said Martha. "I will do my best to be perfectly truthful. I *do* long for happiness; but—this may seem strange to you, and you may even think that I am pretending to be better or more unselfish than others—"

"That I *never* will! I *know* that is n't so. Go on."

"I was going to say that the craving of my heart seems somehow to be impersonal. I want happiness intensely, but the way in which I want it is to see the beings whom I love best have it. Now there are two creatures in the world whom I love supremely—my brother and you. You know that this is so. If I could see both of you happy, in the manner and degree that I want, I believe that I could then be perfectly happy, too. I believe all the needs of my own heart could be answered in that way; and indeed I almost

think that my greed for joy is as great as yours at times. It has strained my heart almost to bursting, in Harold's case, and I feel now almost the same about you. I have never spoken of this to any one; indeed, I was never fully aware of it, I think, until I put it into words now. It must seem quite incredible to you."

"Not in the least. I believe it utterly, or rather it's a stronger thing than belief with me. I feel that it is true. I admire you for it, and all the more because it is so different from me. I want happiness and love for myself—every ounce of flesh, every drop of blood in me longs for it as well as every aspiration of my soul. It is *self* that I am thinking of when I get like this—my own power to enjoy, and also—oh, God *knows* that this is true!—and also the power to give joy to another. Martha, I will tell you something," she said, with a sudden change of tone, dropping her voice, and leaning forward to take both of Martha's hands in hers as she spoke, with her eyes fixed intently on the girl's. "I have known this joy. I have loved supremely, and been loved. You have never tasted that cup of rapture as I have;

but then you have never known, as I have, the anguish of that renunciation. Which of us is the fortunate one? If you knew how I suffer you would probably say that it is you; but if, on the other hand, you knew what ecstasy I have had, I think that you might decide differently. Oh, if God would give me one more hour of it, I think I would be content! One more hour, to take it to the full, knowing that I must, after that, come back to what I suffer now! I think those sixty joy-absorbing minutes would make up to me for everything. But to have it *never again!*"

She broke off, and, hiding her face in her hands, turned away, and lay for some moments quite silent and still. She was not crying—Martha could see that; and when she presently turned, and looked at the young girl, holding out both her hands to her, although there was no smile on her face, it showed that she had conquered her dark mood, and was strong again.

It was a very gentle sort of strength, however, that was not too self-sufficient to feel pleasure in the words and looks and touches of quiet sympathy which Martha gave her now. They sat there, hand in hand, for a

long time; and presently the princess said, with her own beautiful smile:

"You have done me a world of good, Martha. My headache is gone, and also its cause. Sometimes, do you know,—I 'm going to let you see just how weak I am,—sometimes I succumb for days to a mood like this. Nobody knows that tears have anything to do with the headaches that I suffer from—at least nobody but Félicie, and she gives no information. My aunt loves me dearly, but is no more acquainted with the real *me* than if I were a stranger; and yet she adores me—perhaps for that reason. I tell her nothing, because the feelings that I have are quite outside her comprehension, while the headaches are quite within it. She recommends various powders and pellets, and is constantly getting new prescriptions for me. She says my headaches are of a very obstinate type, and I agree with her. To show you how completely you 've cured me," she added, rising to her feet, with an entire change of tone, "I am going to work this afternoon. You will stay and take your lunch with me, and then we 'll be there in time for the second model's pose."

"I can't stay," said Martha, rising too;

"but I will meet you there promptly. I am keeping my cab below, so that I may be back at the atelier by the time the carriage comes for me. You know how very quiet I am keeping my little escapades with you."

"Oh, to be sure!" exclaimed the other, smiling. "I had forgotten the necessity of that precaution. "What *would* 'mama and the girls' say? I think I shall write them an anonymous letter, saying that if madame had been under the impression that her eldest daughter devoted herself wholly to the pursuit of art during the hours of her absence from home, it might have surprised her had she seen the aforesaid young lady this morning come out of the atelier, call a cab, give a number, go to a distant apartment (where she was evidently well known to the concierge, who passed her on to a servant in Russian livery, who as evidently knew her well), enter, by a special passage, a certain room, where she remained shut in for a long time, emerging finally in great haste to drive rapidly in the cab, which she had kept waiting, back to the atelier in time to meet her own carriage, and come innocently home to join the family circle at lunch! Could n't I make out a case?

And what *would* the mother and the little sisters say?"

Martha, too, laughed at the picture ; but in spite of some discomfiture of feeling to which it gave rise, she had no idea of changing her tactics. The very thought of her mother's going to work to investigate the princess, and ascertain if she were a proper friend for her daughter, smote the girl to the heart, and she resolved to guard her secret more carefully than ever. She determined that she would ease her conscience for the deception by confessing everything to her brother when he came. This would make it all right.

As Martha drove back to the atelier, after an affectionate *au revoir* to the princess, she was conscious that something was rankling in her mind. When she came to search for the ground of this feeling, she found it to exist in the confession of love which the princess had made. This knowledge caused Martha to realize that she had not even yet succeeded in putting from her the imaginings by which she had connected her brother and her friend. Before knowing the princess she had always cherished the belief that her brother would sink below her ideal of him if he ever loved

a second time. Lately, however, she had imagined the possibility of his telling her, after knowing the princess, that the old love was not the perfect one he had imagined it; and she could fancy herself forgiving him for loving a second time, with the princess as his apology. It had even seemed to her lately so monstrously wrong and cruel that Harold's life should be wantonly wrecked that she was now prepared to accept a good deal more than would once have seemed possible, in order to see it mended.

Martha, for all her demure appearance, had something that was more or less savage and lawless in her nature, especially where Harold was concerned; and the same feeling, in a lesser degree, dominated her in regard to the princess. She had long ago admitted to herself the fact that Harold had missed his chance of happiness in love; but it was as painful as it was unexpected to her to find that the princess too had loved before. She had known that she had been married, but with very little difficulty she had constructed for herself a theory of that marriage in which the princess had played the part of an innocent victim to circumstance. For instance, she might have

been married by her parents in early youth to a man perhaps far older than herself, whom she had never loved, and for whose death she could not have grieved much.

It was a surprise to Martha now to find how entirely she had let this utterly unfounded idea take possession of her. The words of the princess this morning had shattered it to atoms, and in spite of herself she felt strangely heavy-hearted.

VI

AFTER the morning on which Martha had been by accident a witness of the princess's self-betrayal, there seemed nothing lacking to the complete understanding of the two friends, and their intimacy was now stronger and closer than ever. It was not practicable for Martha to visit the princess very often, as she was compelled to take the time for these visits out of her atelier hours, and both women were too earnest in their work not to begrudge this. Lately they had fallen into the custom of the generality of the students, and went for their midday meal to the *crèmerie* in the neighborhood, after they had visited first the butcher's shop, and selected their own mutton-chop or bit of beef-steak; then they had it cooked according to their directions. This, with fresh rolls and baked apples and milk, made an excellent meal, sometimes augmented by potato salad.

Martha had been initiated into these mysteries by an American girl whose acquaintance she had made through the latter's having once offered to help her on with her "josie," a word which had established an easy footing between them at once.

Martha never exchanged more than a passing remark with the other students, partly because she had, in the beginning, built a sort of barrier around her by her shyness, and, recently, because she felt that her intimacy with the princess, who knew none of the others, set her more than ever apart.

One morning Martha came to the atelier rather late, and showed, moreover, a certain excitement in her movements and expression which she accounted for at lunch-time by telling the princess that her sister's wedding had been hurried up, and was to take place almost immediately.

There were several good reasons for this; one being that it suited much better the plans of the bridegroom elect, and another that Mrs. Keene, being in rather delicate health, had been urged by her physicians to leave Paris. So, as soon as the wedding was over, she was to go south with the younger girls and their

governess; and Martha, who rebelled against being taken from her beloved painting, had a beautiful plan of getting her brother to stay awhile in Paris with her in their mother's apartment. This she confided to the princess with breathless delight, saying that she had written to Harold about it, and told him to cable her if he were willing. Her friend could see that, with her usual license of imagination, Martha had been making all sorts of plans in connection with this scheme, and she more than suspected that some of these concerned herself.

"My dear Martha," she said, with a penetrating look into her friend's eager eyes, "give it up at once, on the spot, if you have been making any plans to introduce your brother to me!"

"Oh, *why?*" said Martha, in tones of the keenest regret.

"Because, my dear, it is out of the question. If you knew how sick to death I am of men, you would not ask it. Please, if you love me, don't speak of it again."

This, of course, was final, and Martha was compelled to bear her disappointment with what patience she could summon. She got a

promise from the princess, however, that she would come to the wedding, which was to take place in the American church. At least this would give her the satisfaction of feeling in the future that her friend had seen her brother, and she hoped she might contrive in some way that the latter should see the princess, since it was now decreed that the intercourse could go no further.

Great as Martha's disappointment was, she forced herself to recognize the fact that, as things were, it might be all for the best that these two should not meet. She could imagine but one result of that meeting, and that, under existing circumstances, might be disastrous to both. Neither of them had fully confided in her, but both of them had told her plainly that a second love was the thing which they most strongly repudiated. In Harold's case, she knew that this feeling was one that his conscience, no less than his heart, ordained; and in the case of the princess, she somehow felt that it was the same.

The princess, for some reason, did not tell Martha what a notable exception to her rule she made in going to this wedding. The fact was, she had never been to any wedding since

her own; and it may have been that fact which accounted for the state of intense excitement which she was in as she drove alone in her carriage through the streets of Paris to the church in the Avenue de l'Alma.

As she got out, and instructed her coachman where to wait, this inward excitement showed in every rapid movement and word. Afterward, when she entered the church, and walked, with a definiteness of manner which would seem to have indicated a prearranged plan, straight down the left-hand aisle to the choir-stalls, her face was flushed and her eyes were brilliant. It was early, and few people had come as yet.

The princess wore a long, dark cloak, which concealed her figure, and on her large hat, which hid the outline of her head, a rather thick Russian veil was fastened, so that her features were scarcely distinguishable.

There was a shaded corner near the organ, behind the chorister-stalls, that was quite screened from the congregation, and so situated as to be almost out of view from the chancel also, if one chose to protect one's self behind the great pillar that stood there. The day was dark and cloudy, but the chancel was

brilliant with lighted candles. The princess with firm confidence walked to this place, and took her seat. She did not seem to care whether the church was filling up or not. She scarcely noticed when some people came and took the seats near her. In these moments she was so lost in thoughts and reminiscences that the furious beating of her heart almost suffocated her.

When, from just behind her, a great organ-note swelled forth, and filled the church with tremulous vibrations, the princess gave a little fluttered start. No one was near enough to observe this, however, or to see the crouching back into her seat which followed it. The music seemed to heighten her emotion, and she trembled visibly. She quite lost count of time, and did not know how long it was before she saw a clergyman enter the chancel and stand there, waiting. Then, as two officers in rich uniforms came and took their places in front of him, the sonorous chords of the old familiar Mendelssohn march swelled from the organ, and the heart within her seemed to stop and sink. It was the sound and influence to which, in perfect joy, she had walked to her own wedding.

She knew that the bridal procession was coming up the aisle, but she did not turn her head to get a view into the church. She felt the people about her rise to their feet, but she sat still. Her trembling limbs would not have held her up; but she did not even know that she was trembling. She knew only that she was waiting—that all her heart and all her soul were wrapped in a bewildering suspense until the coming of what was very near her now. They passed close to her, the girls in their white dresses, and the officers in their glittering uniforms, and stood in divided ranks, leaving the space between them clear.

Into this space, directly in front of the clergyman, there now advanced a woman covered with a cloud of gauzy tulle. She leaned upon the arm of the only man in the party who was not in uniform.

It was on this figure that the princess fastened her eyes, never once removing them until the short ceremony had come to an end. The bride was a shapeless blur. The bridesmaids were a billowy cloud. The officers were mere dazzles of color and gold lace. One object there was that cut its way into her consciousness with acute distinctness—the dark-



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"THE MAN WHO STOOD WAITING TO GIVE THE BRIDE."

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clad, clearly outlined figure and pale profile of the man who stood waiting to give the bride.

When the music ceased, and the minister told the congregation that they were assembled to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, it was another man and woman that she thought of; and so through all the solemn charge and searching questioning that followed.

When the minister asked, "Who giveth this woman to be married?" and the man that she had been watching gave up his companion with a slight inclination of the head, and moved aside, the gaze of the princess still followed and rested on him. When, a moment later, a strange foreign voice said painstakingly, "I, Victor, take thee, Alice, to my wedded wife," what she heard, in natural and familiar English utterance was this: "I, Harold, take thee, Sophia, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance, and thereto I plight thee my troth." And it was her own voice which made answer: "I, Sophia, take thee, Harold."

A hard clutch was on her heart. He was there—the Harold who had made that vow to her; and she, Sophia, was here, in life, not death! “Till death us do part,” they had both of them sworn, and they had let life part them! The terrible wrong of it all rushed over her. The reasons which had made that parting seem to her right before now vanished into air. She felt that crime alone could ever link one of them to another. She felt that this separation between them was in itself a crime, and she who had done it the chief of criminals.

All this she felt with terrifying force, but a feeling stronger than even any of these had taken possession of her—a want and longing had awakened in her heart which strained it almost intolerably. She looked at the bride’s brother, standing there intensely still, in an attitude of complete repose, and a feeling that he was hers, and hers alone took possession of her. She grew reckless of appearances, and stood up in her place, with her face turned full toward him. She heard the clergyman’s stern behest that man put not asunder those whom God hath joined, and she heard him pronounce that they were man and wife, in

the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Her heart said a solemn amen.

Imagination lingered on these thrilling thoughts while the blessing was pronounced and the service ended ; and then the little procession, the bride and bridegroom at its head, and the figure that she watched at his mother's side behind them, passed her and went down the aisle, while the familiar music was playing, to which she had walked from the altar a blissfully happy wife—and she was left alone !

The organist quickly closed the organ, and hurried away. The people near her moved off too ; and still she sat there motionless, feeling herself deserted and most miserable. A boy, putting out the candles, roused her to consciousness, and somehow she got out of the place.

VII

MRS. KEENE'S apartment on the Place de la Madeleine was a scene of joyful commotion and confusion. The small breakfast which followed the wedding was an informal affair; and though it was supposed that only the nearest personal friends were present, the rooms were cheerfully crowded, and the uniforms made a show and glitter. The charming girls who were permitted to be their sister's bridesmaids were the object of much notice and attention; and when the company had risen from the table, the eldest sister, who was so much the least pretty and vivacious, was scarcely missed from the room. A few people inquired for the bride's brother, who had also disappeared; but as he was a stranger to every one, the fact of his absence was little noticed.

Martha, when she went to look for Harold, found him in his own room, smoking.

"I knew it was you," he said, as she came in, closing the door behind her. "I thought you would come to look me up; but why did you? I'm poor company for anybody to-day. Well," he added, with a short, deep breath, "thank the Lord, that's over! When you get married, Martha, I want you to elope. I've no business at a wedding. I feel that I have cast an evil eye on Alice and Victor."

"Oh, Harold, I was thinking of you more than of them all the time," said Martha, earnestly. "It did seem absolute cruelty to have required it of you. How *could* mama!"

Concentrated as her tone and manner were, she was doubtful whether they even penetrated the consciousness of her companion, who, with his chair tipped backward, his frock-coat thrown open, with a ruthless disregard of the smart gardenia which ornamented its lapel, and his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, was smoking vigorously, and looking away from her out of the window.

Martha had come here in the ardent hope of giving comfort, and she felt a little hurt. She smothered the feeling back into her heart, however, as she said:

"I knew it was anguish to you, standing there and going through that ceremony."

He turned, and looked at her.

"Well, rather!" he said, with a short laugh, still keeping the cigar in his mouth, and talking with his teeth clenched upon it. Then he turned his face toward the window again; but his glance was so vague that Martha felt that he saw some picture in his mind, rather than the scene below. "The service was the same," he said, clasping his hands behind his head, and narrowing his eyes as if to get the perspective. "The music was the same—and those roses! And that was not all. Vivid as she always is to me in every other respect, I have not always been able to hold on to her voice; but to-day I heard it perfectly, saying, 'I, Sophia, take thee, Harold,' and all the rest."

He got up suddenly, threw his cigar into the grate, and walked across the room.

"Oh, poor Harold!" Martha said, her voice thick with tears.

The effect of her words was instantaneous. He turned suddenly, and showed in both face and figure a swiftly summoned and effectual calm.

"My dear girl," he said quickly, "you don't suppose I'm posing for an injured husband, I hope? I have suffered, of course; but with a man certain kinds of suffering get to be a business. To speak of it seems like talking shop. It's detestable to be talking it to you now; but the truth is, this wedding affair has nearly knocked me out. I could have gone on keeping up the bluff, of course, and talked the usual bosh with the wedding-guests in yonder; but I found I had a contract with myself that had to be seen to. It has cost me something to smooth out and harden down my thoughts and feelings about my own life; but I had got the thing done. This wedding business, however, upheaved it all. When I found that I was actually sinking into the mushy swamp of self-pity, I thought it was about time to come away, and steady up my nerve a bit. I'm all right now, however, and I see clear again. The thing's over, and no harm is done."

Martha's eyes followed him wistfully as he turned to the dressing-table, picked up a brush, and smoothed the swart surface of his thick, dark hair, brushed some specks of dust from his coat, and carefully straightened the injured flower.

"Shall we go back?" he said. "We may be missed."

"Don't go quite yet. No one will think about us," she said; and then she added doubtfully: "May I talk to you a little, Harold?"

"Certainly, my dear. Talk all you want," he answered, sitting down; "only there's nothing to say."

"Where is she? I've so often longed to know."

"I have n't the least idea. She asked me not to follow her movements, and I never have."

"Then you do not even know whether she is living or dead?"

"Yes; I know that much. She is not dead. I feel her in the world. If she went out of it, I believe I should know it. Besides, I would have been informed of that. She spoke of it, and said so."

There was a moment's pause, which Martha broke.

"Will you tell me this," she said, "whether you are as hopeless about it all as you were when I last spoke to you of it?"

"Exactly as hopeless. When a thing is ab-

solute, my dear, it does n't have degrees. I have never been anything else than hopeless since the hour of my last interview with her. She told me then," he said, with a sort of cold conciseness, "that her first wish was to set me absolutely free. She said she wanted me to marry again. She said that just as soon as we had lived apart the time required by law for a divorce, she wanted me to get it. She said she was sorry there was no way to get it sooner. She said, also, that she would take back her maiden name."

He got up, thrust his hands into his pockets, and, walking over to the window, stood there for a moment. Then he turned suddenly, and came and stood in front of Martha, looking her directly in the eyes. She saw by that look that he was calm and steady, and so she ventured to question him a little further.

"Do you know whom she lives with?" she asked.

"With an aunt, whose life, as she told me, is utterly out of the world that we knew together. She said that, on this account, there was good reason to hope that we would never meet again."

Martha, who felt that this subject might not be spoken of between them again, continued to question him as he stood and looked down at her with a perfect consciousness of self-possession.

"Was she so beautiful?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"And are you still unchanged in giving her the supreme place that you did give her from the moment you first saw her?"

"Yes," he said again.

"Oh, Harold," exclaimed the girl, "I sometimes think it might have turned out differently if the marriage had not been so rash and sudden."

He took a seat near her, and continued to look at her as he said:

"It could have made no difference to me. You don't fully understand it, Martha. It is impossible that you should. I knew, the day I met her, that I had been set apart and saved for her. I know it now. It was the kind of gravitation that comes once in a life."

"Then you do not regret it?"

"For myself, not in the least. She was my wife for a month. What I have gone through since is a small price to pay for that. But

when I think of what it has cost her—that most delicate of women—to face the odium of it—that superb woman's life shadowed by the vulgarity of a suddenly ruptured marriage; and—deeper than that!—to have her best life maimed forever—God! I curse the day that I was born!”

“And what has she brought on you, I'd like to know?” cried Martha. “It was she who cast you off—not you her. Ah, Harold, if she had been the woman she should have been, she never could have done it!”

He looked at her with some impatience in his glance.

“Whether she was the woman she should have been or not is a thing that neither concerns nor interests me. She was the woman I loved. The whole thing is in that.”

“And the woman you still love? Is that true, Harold?”

“True as death,” he said; “but what does it all matter? Your relentlessness is the friend's natural feeling. It shows how bootless it is to give account. I care more for your opinion than any other, but even your scorn does not signify to me here. It misses the point. The only pride that is involved is pride

in my own immutability. Love ought always to be a regeneration," he went on, as if putting into shape the thoughts that were rising out of the recent chaos in his mind. "It's easy enough to keep true when the love, the joy, the equal give and take, go on unbroken. It's when a man actually turns and walks out of heaven, and the gates shut behind him forever, that he finds out the stuff that's in him. Sometimes, when I think about it, I try to fancy what would be my humiliation if I found I had grown to love her less."

Martha was silent a moment. Then she said, as if urged by the necessity of speaking out, for this once, all that she had so long kept back:

"Suppose, after you get the divorce, you should hear that she was married?"

"I'm braced to bear that, if it comes," he said. "I know it is possible, but I don't fear it. I may, of course, be wrong; but I don't believe, with what has been between us, that she could ever be the wife of another man while I lived. She might think so. She might even try—go part of the way; but I never felt more secure of anything than that she would find herself unable to do it."

"Then do you think that she possibly still cares for you?"

"No; I'm not a fool. She made that point sufficiently plain. Did n't she tell me, in the downright, simple words, that she did not love me — had never loved me — had found out it was all a mistake? I believe she meant it absolutely. I believe it was true. You don't suppose, if I doubted it, I'd have given her up as I have done?"

"Oh, Harold, what was it all about, that quarrel that you had? Could you bear to tell me?"

"There's nothing to tell. We thought we were perfectly suited, perfectly sympathetic. Our feelings had stood every test but marriage. When it came to that, they failed. It was a case of non-adjustment of feelings — different points of view — different natures, perhaps. I saw facing me the demand that I should change myself, root and branch, and become a different creature from what God had made me. This I could not do. I might have pretended and acted, but she was not the woman to tolerate the wretched puppet of a man which that would have made of me. *Her* changing was a thing I never thought of.

I was never mean enough to think that a woman was bound to sacrifice her individuality in marriage. Why should a wife surrender that sacred citadel any more than a husband? How odious should I feel myself, if I had ever taken that position in the slightest degree! And shams were out of the question with us. Neither of us could have tolerated anything uncandid—anything that smacked of a tacit convention.”

There was a moment's pause, and then Martha broke out impulsively:

“I can't help thinking that it might have been prevented. It may be that you were too proud. Have you ever thought that?”

“No,” he said, with a certain grimness. “I have never taken that view of the case. She made it so entirely plain that she wanted to be rid of me at once and forever—that there was no room for reflection on that point. If there is a man alive who could have held her bound after her words to me, I hope I may never make his acquaintance.”

The appearance of agitation which had marked the beginning of the interview was now utterly gone from Harold. He spoke deliberately, and as if with a certain satisfac-

tion in the sense of getting his thoughts into form.

Again there was a pause. Then Martha said, speaking very low :

"But, Harold, you are doing without love."

"I have had it," he answered, "and what has been is mine, to keep forever. I have lost my wife, but the greatness, the exaltation, of my love increases. I have learned that love is subjective and independent. A renunciation is only an episode in it. I deserve no pity. No, Martha; never fall into the mistake of pitying me. I should pity you from my heart if I thought you would miss what I have had; and the gods may be lenient to as sweet a soul as yours. You may have the joy, some day, without the renunciation."

"I don't want it! I would n't have it!" cried the girl, vehemently. "No one will ever love me, and I would n't have them to. It would break my heart. It makes me seem ridiculous even to speak of it. I want *you* to have love and joy. That is all I ask."

"Well, I've had it. Be satisfied. Of the two of us,—except that you have hope, which I have not,—you are the one to be pitied."

"Oh, Harold, *don't!* Unless you want to

"AS SHE HAD SEEN HER ONCE BEFORE."



break my heart outright, don't talk to me about being happy. I want happiness for *you*: *I've* got no use for it."

She got up as she spoke, and moved toward him. Harold stood up, too, and bent to kiss her. Demonstrations between them were unusual, and it was a very Martha-like instinct that made her now so incline her head as to receive his caress upon her hair.

"We will go back to the others now," said Harold. "Thank you, Martha."

So together they went back to the wedding-party.



"I KNEW IT WAS ANGUISH TO YOU."

"AS SHE HAD SEEN HER ONCE BEFORE."



VIII

THE day after the wedding, when the bridal pair had left Paris by one train and the bride's mother and younger sisters by another, when Harold had gone off to attend to some business which formed one part of the reason of his coming to Paris, Martha, having now full use of the carriage, ordered it to wait outside the atelier while she went in to see if the princess was there. It confirmed a suspicion which had somehow got into her head when she found that her friend was absent. With scarcely a glance at the model and the busy students, she withdrew, and, reëntering her carriage, ordered her coachman to drive her to the Rue Presbourg.

Upon going at once to her friend's private rooms, she found her lying on the lounge in semi-darkness, as she had seen her once before; but now there were no tears, nor any trace of them.

"I have a real headache this time," she said, as she stretched out her hand, with a smile. "It's better than it was, though, and I am glad to see you."

"Were you at the wedding?" was Martha's first eager question, when she had kissed her friend and taken the seat beside her.

"Yes, I was there," said the other promptly. "How charming you looked in your bridesmaid's dress, and how handsome your Alice really is!"

She wondered what Martha would think if she knew the truth—that she had seen Alice and herself scarcely more than if they had not been present!

"And you saw Harold?" was the next question.

"Yes; I saw your paragon of paragons," was the answer, spoken in light and well-guarded tones.

Martha's face fell. Still, she was too earnest to be lightly rebuffed, so she went on:

"And what did you think of him? Now, Sonia, don't tease me! You know how important it is to me—what you think of Harold. Do tell me, dear, and don't laugh."

In response to this earnest appeal the prin-

cess's face grew grave. She did not look at Martha, however, but occupied herself with twisting up her loosened hair as she answered:

"I thought him handsome, dear. I thought his face both strong and clever. I could understand you loving him so much. I could see nothing in his face, or figure, or expression, that looked in the least degree unworthy of the great ideal that you have of him. There! Does that satisfy you?"

She caught Martha's chin between her thumb and forefinger, and for a second she met her gaze full. Then she got up hastily, and walked across the room.

When she presently came back, she had the air of a person thoroughly on guard, and conscious of her ability to cope with circumstances. She did not return to the lounge, but sat upright on a stiff sofa which admitted of no lounging. Martha, glowing with pleasure at her heroine's praise of her hero, was determined to follow up her advantage.

"Oh, you will take back what you said, and let me bring him to see you—won't you, Sonia?" she said ardently. "We are going to have the apartment to ourselves for weeks, Harold and I; and we three could have such

ideal times—such little dinners and jaunts to the play! As things are with you both, I think there is all the more reason for you to know each other. You could be such friends! I should think a real man friend would be such a comfort to you. You seem made for that sort of *camaraderie*, as well as for love. And what a comfort the friendship of such a woman as you would be to Harold! I feel myself at times so inadequate to him, and I have the very same feeling, sometimes, with you. I will confess to you, Sonia, that I did have a hope once, even though you are a princess and he just a simple American gentleman, that you and Harold might some time, after years, come to be something to each other; but I have given that up. I see that it is impossible to either of you. I had a talk with Harold yesterday, and he is as much protected by his past as you are by yours. So there could be no danger to either in such an intercourse. Oh, Sonia, *won't* you consent to it?"

There was great gravity and deliberation in the tones of the princess as she answered impressively:

"Now, Martha, listen to me. I want you to put that idea out of your head at once and

forever. You will do this, I am sure, when I tell you how it distresses me and embarrasses our whole intercourse. You are quite mistaken in supposing that I have either a need or a desire for the friendship of any man alive. You really must believe me when I tell you that I am sick of men. One reason that I have so entirely given up society is that they fret me so with their offers of what you and they call friendship. I did have men friends once, and I know what they amount to. While I was married, my—I mean the man I married—was my friend. Since I lost him I have never had another.”

As she ended, she rose and walked across the room. Her tone was so decided that Martha felt that she could say nothing more, and so, with a sigh, she gave up this dream too.

In a moment the princess returned, bringing two photographs, which she had taken from a drawer.

“I have been looking at some old pictures this morning,” she said. “This one was taken when, as a girl, I was presented at the English court.”

She was silent while Martha was uttering

her glowing words of praise, as she looked at the photograph of the beautiful young girl in her white court-dress with plumes and veil; and then she put the other into her hand, saying quietly:

"This was taken in my wedding-dress, a few days after my marriage."

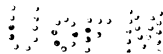
Her manner indicated a controlled excitement, but she was quite unprepared for the effect that this photograph had upon Martha. The girl fixed her eyes upon it with a sort of greedy delight, and while she drew in her breath with thick, short respirations, the hand that held the picture trembled.

"I can see it all!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Sonia, were you ever really as happy as that? What were you looking at, with your head turned in that eager way?"

"Yes, I was a Happy Princess once, my dear. But you are a wonderful creature, Martha! No one but you ever thought to ask that question, so I have been saved the embarrassment of explaining. Since you have asked me, I will tell you that I was looking at my husband. While the photographer was posing me in various ways, my husband was waiting for me. He was supposed to be out



“‘OH, SONIA, WERE YOU EVER REALLY AS HAPPY AS THAT?’”



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of sight, but I heard a newspaper rustle, and looked quickly around, and caught a glimpse of him, between two screens, seated quietly and unconsciously reading the paper. One of those great rushes of passionate tenderness which the sight of the man she loves can sometimes bring to a woman's heart came over me. At that moment the photographer got the instantaneous impression. I don't know why I should tell you all this, except that you saw it all there. To other people there never seemed any special significance in the picture."

She reached out her hand to take back the photographs, but Martha handed her only the first.

"Oh, Sonia, *let* me keep this!" she begged. "It is such delight to me to look at it!"

"No, dear; I could n't. No one but myself should ever see that picture. I ought not perhaps to have shown it to you. It was just an impulse. Promise never to speak of either of these pictures—not even to me. You never will?"

"Never," said Martha, sadly, as she gave the picture up. Her friend took it, and, without glancing at it, locked it away in a drawer.

When she came back her whole manner had

U O P M

changed. She began at once to talk about her work at the atelier, and told Martha that Étienne wished her to enter a picture for the Salon. The wedding preparations had kept Martha at home a good deal lately, and the princess had some interesting bits of news to give her. She was very graphic in her account of some of Étienne's last criticisms, and got into high spirits, in which Martha, somehow, could not entirely take part.

The girl went away at last rather heavy-hearted. This conversation had deprived her of her last hope of bringing the princess and her brother together. She had an engagement with Harold for the afternoon, so she could not go to the atelier; but she promised to meet the princess there in good time next morning.

That afternoon she indulged herself in giving her brother a brief account of her romantic friendship. She did not, however, mention the name by which the princess was known to her, or any but the external facts in the case.

As she had foreseen, her brother made no objection to the intercourse, and told her she had been very wise to keep the whole thing

to herself. He did not seem in the least surprised that the princess refused to make his acquaintance, and explained it to Martha by saying that she was probably an independent and self-willed young woman, who was disposed to suit only herself in the matter of friends ; but that this was not inconsistent with a certain regard for conventionalities, and it was probable that she did not care to bother with her family, or even to take the trouble to find out anything about them. Martha felt that her brother was moderately interested in the matter because of its relation to herself ; but in spite of all her enthusiasm she could not feel that she had inspired him with any special interest in the princess, or any appreciably greater desire to make her acquaintance than she had shown to make his.

IX

A FEW days later Martha came to the atelier in a state of only half-concealed excitement. She had a plan which she broached to the princess with some timidity. She began by saying that her brother was compelled to be absent from Paris during the whole of the next day, and that, as it was Sunday, and there would be no work at the atelier, she would have the whole day on her hands.

"Come and spend it with me," said the princess.

"Oh, if you would only come and spend it with *me*!" said Martha, so wistfully that her friend laughed gaily, and said:

"Why not?"

"Harold takes an early train, and will not be back until night," said Martha; "and it would be such joy to have you in my own room, sitting in my own chair, lying on my own bed, standing on my own rugs, and giv-

ing me sweet associations with these things forever."

"Of course I'll come—with pleasure," said Sonia, pausing in her work to answer Martha's whispered words.

So, in this dream, at least, Martha was not to be disappointed; and she parted from her friend with the delightful expectation that she was to see her next as her guest.

The young girl waked early next morning, and had her first breakfast with her brother; and after he had gone she found the time long while she waited for her visitor. No definite hour had been agreed upon, and she was afraid that the princess would come far too late to suit her eager longing. Still she had not liked to urge too much upon her.

Martha had ordered heaps of flowers to make her room and the little boudoir which adjoined it look attractive; and she took Harold in to inspect them before he went away. He rushed through hurriedly, said everything was charming, gave her a hasty kiss, and was gone.

She stood at the window, which looked upon the Place de la Madeleine, and waited a long time, thinking deeply. The flower-mar-

ket below was unusually rich, as the day was warm and springlike ; and it presently occurred to her that among the glowing masses of bloom exposed to view there were some varieties of flowers which she did not have. She therefore determined to fill up a part of the time of waiting by going down to get some of these. Hastily putting on her hat, she ran down the winding stairway, crossed the open space, and was soon threading her way among the flower-stalls under the shadow of the beautiful great church. She kept her eye on the entrance to her apartment-house, however ; and as she knew the princess's carriage and livery, she felt that there was no danger of failing to see her friend, should she happen to arrive during her brief absence.

The princess, however, did not come in her carriage, or, rather, she sent it away after having crossed the thronged streets of the Place de la Concorde, and, wrapped in her dark cloak, she walked quickly along with the foot-passengers until she reached the house of which she was in search. Then she slipped quietly in, and mounted the steps to the third story.

Her ring was answered by a man-servant,



"I BEG YOUR PARDON," HE SAID AGAIN."



who explained that his young mistress had just gone down to the flower-market for a moment, and who ushered her into the large salon to wait.

Scarcely was she seated there when the bell rang again, and the servant opened the door to admit Harold. He had forgotten an important paper, and had come back for it in great haste. He knew that it was his part to avoid the princess in case she should have arrived; but concluding that she would, of course, be with Martha in her own rooms, he came directly into the salon, which was the nearest way of reaching his own apartment.

When he had entered, and the door was closed behind him, he took two or three steps forward, and then stopped as if petrified in his place.

The princess had risen to her feet, and stood confronting him, her face as pale and agitated as his own.

"I beg your pardon," he said, taking off his hat mechanically; "did you, perhaps, wish to see me?"

"No," she answered; "I wished to see your sister. She has gone across to the flower-market."

Her eyes had fallen under his, and she felt that she was trembling as she stood in front of him and answered his questions as mechanically as a stupid child.

"I beg your pardon," he said again ; and he seemed to grow paler still as he stood there irresolute.

"Do you wish to see my sister alone?" he then said. "I don't understand. Do you wish me to stay or to go?"

"I wish you to go," she said, rallying a little as the thought occurred to her that Martha might return. "Your sister is expecting me. I came with the understanding that you were to be away."

A light broke over him, but it cast a sudden shadow on his face.

"You are, then, the princess of whom she has spoken to me," he said. "I beg your pardon."

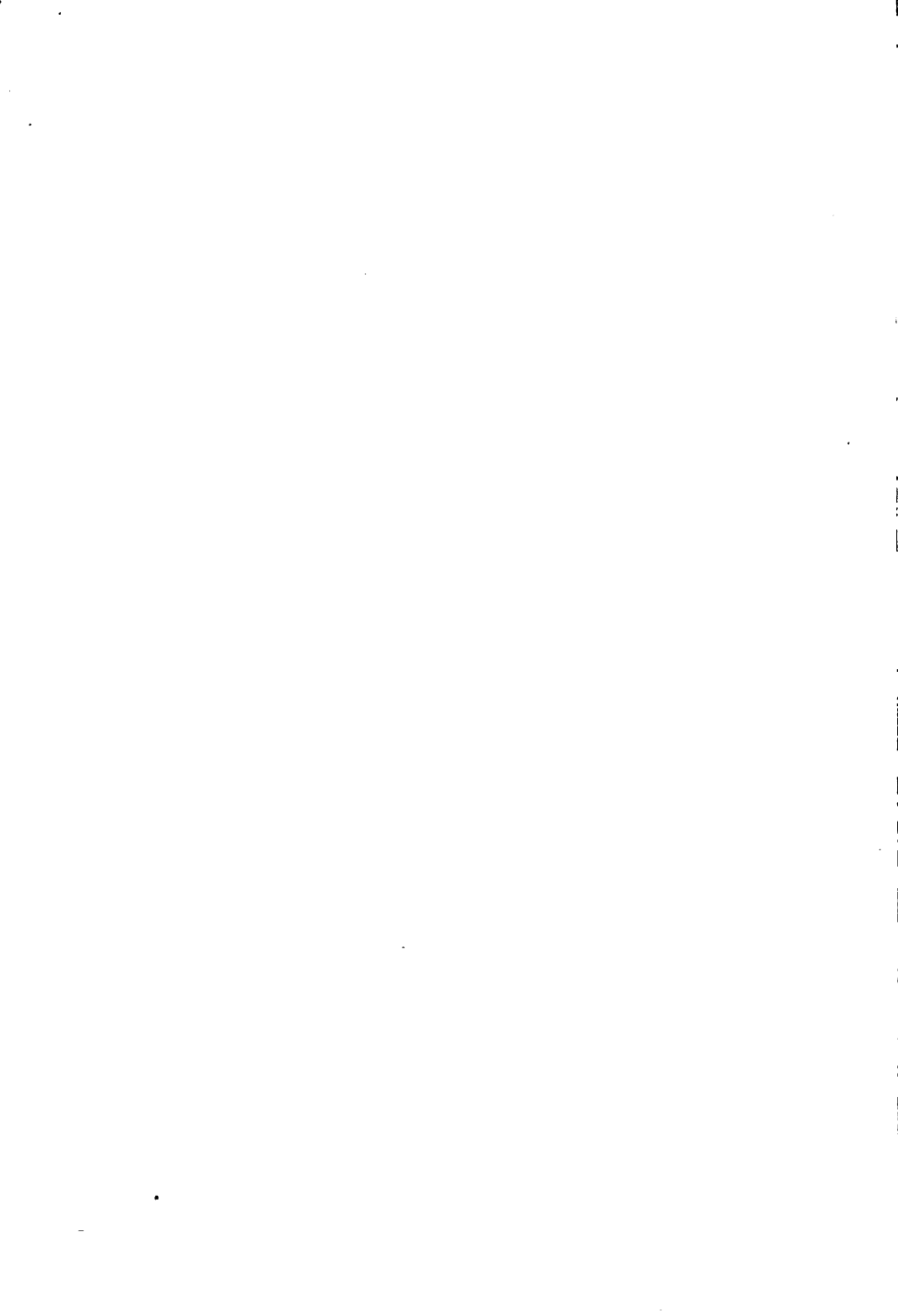
"I am Sophia Rutledge," she said. "Martha believes me to be a princess, and I let her think it. Some one in the atelier told her so. What will you tell her now?"

"Exactly what you wish."

"Say nothing. Let her keep her delusion. Her friendship is dear to me ; I do not wish it turned to hate."



"AMONG THE FLOWER-STALLS.



"I shall say nothing," he said.

They both stood silent there a moment, looking away from each other. Then the woman, feeling her knees grow weak and trembling under her, sank back into her seat ; and the man, urged by some impulse of self-protection which demanded that he should fly, had bowed and left the room before she had quite recovered from the momentary dizziness which had possessed her as she fell into her chair. She heard the front door close behind him presently, and knew that he was gone. Then she felt that she must brace herself to meet Martha calmly.

When the young girl, a few moments later, came in with her load of flowers, and smilingly uttered her apologies and surprise at having missed her, her friend's senses seemed somehow to return, and she was able to answer calmly.

It seemed to Martha that the beautiful princess looked ill, and she was tenderly anxious about her ; but she little suspected that during those few moments of her absence Sonia and her old love had been face to face, or, more marvelous still, that Harold had seen again the woman who had been his wife.

X

THE impression left upon the mind of Sonia by that meeting with Harold was an intensely disturbing one. Even the stirrings of old feeling, and the memories of past pleasures and pains, which the sight of him had recalled, were less strong in her than a certain feeling of humiliation. She felt that she had been overcome by so great a weakness that she must have made a self-betrayal of which it nearly maddened her to think. Knowing how completely she had been thrown off her guard by this totally unexpected meeting, she felt that every emotion of her heart, which she herself was so conscious of, had been laid bare to him, and she could not rest for the torment of that thought. Her hours with Martha were therefore disturbed and unsatisfactory to them both ; and when, soon after the mid-day meal, Martha asked her if she would like to drive, she accepted the relief of that idea with alac-

city, only stipulating that they should not go to the crowded Bois.

Martha ordered the carriage, and they drove about for an hour or two, stopping several times to go in and look at churches which they had often seen, but never entered. In some of these vespers were in progress, and they paid their sous for seats near the door, and sat down for a few moments; but the music played too dangerously upon Sonia's overwrought feelings, and she hurried her friend away.

In one or two of the smaller churches there were only silent kneeling figures here and there, and the two women walked about, looking at the mixture of dignified antiquity and tawdry decoration on every side, and reading the tablets all about the approach to the chancel, erected as thank-offerings to Mary and Joseph for favors granted. In spite of her inward perturbation, Sonia could not help smiling at the economy of words on some of these. One or two had merely, "Merci, Joseph," or "Merci, Marie et Joseph," while the more elaborate ones recorded the thanks of the giver of the tablet for a favor received—the restoration of a beloved child from illness, the conversion of an erring son, the rescue of a

husband from shipwreck, and even the miraculous intervention of Mary and Joseph to restore to health a little boy who had been gored by a bull. The very ignorance of it was touching to the two women, and the conviction that it was in each of these poor hearts a reaching upward kept them from feeling any scorn.

As they returned to their carriage, Martha, who during the recent scene had been furtively watching her friend's face, now saw upon it an expression which she was at a loss to account for. Was it, she wondered, religious devotion, stirred by the associations of the church, which made the lovely face beside her look so passionately tense with feeling? For the first time it occurred to her to wonder what her friend's religion was.

"Are you a Catholic, Sonia?" she said.

The answer came impulsively :

"No, I am not a Catholic. It is easier to say what I am not than what I am—except that, before and beyond all, I am a miserable woman."

As these words escaped her the lack of self-control of which they gave proof was so alarming to her that she begged her friend to take her home at once, saying that she was really

not well, and must be alone to rest. Martha felt chilled and hurt. It was all so disappointing, and she seemed so completely put at a distance. The day which she had looked forward to with such eager joy had turned out dreary and sad. There was nothing to do, however, but to drive her friend back to her apartment.

When they got there, Sonia turned and kissed her warmly, but said nothing; and Martha drove home, feeling lonely and perplexed.

She did not expect to see the princess at the atelier next morning; but to her amazement, when she got there quite early herself, the beautiful, lithe figure was already before the easel, hard at work. There was, moreover, an air of strength and self-reliance about her which offered the greatest contrast to her manner of the day before.

As Martha came into the room, Sonia, who was one of the quiet group around the model—a thin child who twitched and wriggled and could not keep still for two consecutive minutes—waved her a welcome with a little flourish of her brush, and gave her a bright, decided nod. It was too late for Martha to

get a position near her, so talk was impossible until the midday recess; but that gesture, glance, and bow of the head were enough of themselves to put new spirit into the girl, and she found her place, and fell to work, going ahead with more vim than she had been able to command for a long time.

When rest-time came the two friends showed their canvases to each other, and both of them could see the improvement in their work. Feeling much encouraged, they went off to the butcher's shop, selected their chops, and while waiting for them to be cooked, sat at their little table in the *cr  merie*, and talked.

At first they spoke only of their atelier work and Etienne's criticisms and suggestions; but when that was pretty much talked out for the moment, Sonia, with a sudden change of manner, said abruptly:

"I want to atone to you for the gruesome mood that I was in when I went to see you yesterday. If you'll invite me again, I will be different—and, oh, by the way, I've got over that foolish idea that I had about not meeting your brother. If it would give you any pleasure, I don't in the least object. It would certainly be very silly to let him spoil

this beautiful chance of our being together, as it would if I refused to meet him."

Martha looked at her in surprise. She had so entirely made up her mind that the powers had decreed that these two beings should not meet that Sonia's words rather disconcerted her.

"Oh, are you not pleased?" said the latter, disappointedly. "I thought it would delight you."

"So it does," said Martha, quickly; "but, to be perfectly frank, I had so entirely accepted the idea that there might be some unknown danger in a meeting between you two that I had given it up; and now that the likelihood of it comes again, some sense of danger comes with it. You both seem such tremendous forces—in my eyes, at least,—that it is not like any ordinary acquaintanceship. It is very foolish, though; for even two locomotives may rush toward each other without danger, if each is solid on its own track, leading to its different destination. And surely no harm is done when they come very close, and exchange signals of friendliness, and then part, and go their opposite ways."

"Perfectly sage and true! Most wisely

spoken!" said Sonia. "So you are reconciled now, are you? What weathercocks we women are! I am sure I may say it of you as well as of myself, contrasting your former eagerness with your present reluctance for this meeting. Well, I suppose it's a part of our nature, and I don't know that men are so very different."

"Harold is different," said Martha.

"Oh, no doubt *he* is quite, quite the immaculate," said her friend, lightly; and then, with a sudden change, she added in tones of extreme earnestness:

"Martha, you have never told him one word about me — have you? Nothing, I mean, of what I have told you or let you see concerning myself. All that was and must remain sacred between you and me."

"Not a word, not a syllable!" cried Martha. "How could you even ask? He knows of you only as my atelier friend, and that you are a Russian princess, and he knows of my visits to you, and my love and admiration for you; but not one word of what your confidence has taken me into about yourself personally. I told him how little I knew or cared to know about you — that you were a young and beau-

tiful widow, whose past history was wholly unknown to me. What you have let me see of the writing which that history has made upon your heart was a sacred confidence which no power could ever draw out of me."

"I knew it, dear. I never doubted it. Don't defend yourself, as if I had distrusted you. It is because I do trust you that I consent to meet your brother. I would certainly not willingly make the acquaintance of any man who could possibly be supposed to know as much of my heart and its weaknesses as I have revealed to you."

"And when will you come to me again?" said Martha, allowing herself to feel unchecked the joy which the prospect before her stirred within her heart.

"I will dine with you to-morrow, if you like," said Sonia, with an air of decision.

It was an intense surprise to Harold when Martha told him that the princess was to dine with her next evening. He at once proposed to go out and leave them *tête-à-tête*, but his wonder increased when he was told that the princess had avowed her willingness to meet him. After hearing that, there was but one thing for him to do. This he saw plainly;

but at the same time he realized that a more difficult ordeal could not possibly be put before him. What could be her object in a course so extraordinary, and what could be the feeling in her heart to make such a course possible?

He had believed her to be deeply moved, as no sensitive woman could fail to be, by their unexpected meeting of the day before; but that she should deliberately wish to repeat the meeting looked like the most heartless caprice. She had always been capricious, daring, and impetuous, and had loved to do unusual and exciting things; but that he could excuse as a part of her character and individuality. Heartless he had never had occasion to think her. Even her sudden recoil from him and repudiation of their marriage he believed to be the result of some commanding quality of her fine nature, which he could not help reverencing, even though he did not comprehend it.

The courtship of Harold Keene and Sophia Rutledge had been very short, and their wedding sudden. He had met the young English girl in London near the close of the season; had seen her first in her court-dress, at her presentation; and had afterward spent ten days with her at a country house. Their mu-

tual attraction had been a current which had swept everything before it; and when it had to be decided whether or not she should go on a voyage to Japan with her aunt, as had been planned,—a prospect which would separate them for months to come,—they took things into their own hands, and were married at short notice. The parents of Miss Rutledge were both dead. Her father, an Englishman, had married a Russian; and it was her mother's sister with whom she was supposed to live, though she had spent most of her grown-up years, and all of her childhood, in England. Her aunt was now a widow and a feverishly enthusiastic traveler, and the girl had looked forward with some pleasure to the long travels ahead of them. Her sudden marriage to the young American, introduced to her by some common friends, changed her life absolutely; but Harold was determined that she should realize at least one of her ardent dreams of travel, and take a journey up the Nile. Soon after their marriage they had set out on this journey, and the history of its rapturous beginning and miserable ending was known only to themselves.

In this way it had happened that Harold's wife had never been seen by his family, and he

had even declined to send them a photograph of her. He said he disliked photographs, and none could ever give a fair representation of his beautiful wife. He wrote Martha that she must do her best to restrain her impatience, as they were to come at once to America at the end of their honeymoon on the Nile, and to make their home there, while he settled down to work.

Instead of this, however, came the brief announcement of their separation, which almost broke Martha's heart. She had put aside any natural feeling of deprivation and pain, to throw herself, heart and soul, into the delight of Harold's romantic marriage, and as the young couple dreamed their way up the old Nile, she dreamed it with them. It is probable that few people in the world get the intense joy out of their personal experiences of love that this ardent and impassioned girl derived from the mere imagination of her brother's happiness. The blow that followed it was therefore very keen and deep. The courage and complete reserve which her brother had shown in the matter had given her strength to bear it; but, in spite of that, a permanent shadow had been cast upon her life.

XI

AS SONIA got out of her carriage before the house in the Place de la Madeleine, and mounted the steps with her maid, her heart was beating violently, but she had never been stronger in the sense of complete self-possession. She knew that a difficult ordeal was before her, but she had no fear that her spirit would falter. It was only necessary for her to remember her former weakness, and how she had paled and cowered before Harold, to make her securer in her defiant resolution with every pulse-beat.

At the door of the apartment she dismissed her maid, and, dropping the train of her heavy dress, swept into the little ante-chamber, regally tall and self-collected, to the admiration of the servants, who thought her every inch a princess.

A door opposite opened, and Martha appeared in a pretty evening gown and led her friend into the salon.

Near the table, holding the "Figaro" in his hands, and bending his eyes upon its columns, sat Harold. His severe evening dress, his grave, dark face, with its close-trimmed, pointed beard, and his straight, smooth hair, with its definite part, all spoke of composure, deliberation, and repose.

He rose to his feet, laid down the paper, and stood in his place, waiting. His sister's guest had taken off her lace hood and thrown open her cloak, between the parted folds of which appeared a rich evening dress. She came forward, moving lightly in her heavy garments, and when Martha, with a fluttering heart, which made her manner somewhat excited and confused, said, looking from one to the other, "My brother, Mr. Keene—the Princess Mannernorff," she looked him full in the face with what Martha thought a rather haughty look, and gave him a somewhat ceremonious bow.

Harold met her gaze with unflinching eyes, and bowed in his turn with an air which Martha thought unnecessarily formal and distant. After all she had said to each about the other, it disappointed her that their meeting should be so absolutely without cordiality. She

asked her friend if she would come into her room to lay aside her wraps ; but the latter declined, and threw her cloak and hood upon a chair before Harold had time to offer his assistance.

She was dressed in a plain gown of thick yellow satin, with trimmings of brown fur and creamy lace. A diamond arrow pierced the mass of her rich brown hair, and a great clasp of many-colored jewels in an antique setting held the folds of her gown at the waist. She wore no other ornaments, and her beautiful arms and hands were without bracelets or rings. She did not seat herself, but opened a fan, and stood waving it softly as she looked down at Martha from her greater height. The introduction had, of course, been in French, and the conversation continued in that language.

In strong contrast to her glowing brilliancy of color Harold was very pale as he stood with his shoulders braced against the mantel, and talked to her. He was, however, quite as collected as she.

Presently she began to wonder dimly if he were not more so ; for underneath her assured calm of manner there was a wild excitement

of which she was intensely aware, and all the force of her will was set upon the effort of concealing it from her companions.

She did not wish Martha to know that she was excited; and to have this quiet man in front of her get even a suspicion that she was not fully as composed as he appeared to be, was a thought that she could not endure.

She began to talk about the atelier where she and Martha had met and made friends, and she gave an amusing description of her first encounter with Etienne when she had gone there to enter her name as a pupil.

"It was my first venture into the Bohemia of the Latin Quarter," she said; "and I felt brave, but self-protective, when I reached the place and went in, with my maid, to investigate. The cloak-room was empty, and when I got to the atelier, and walked around the great piece of sail-cloth which turned its dirty and undecorated side toward me, I saw a fat little old man, in carpet slippers, and a dirty, besmeared linen blouse, and black skull-cap, washing brushes in some soft soap contained in an old lobster-can. 'I wish to see M. Etienne,' I said rather haughtily; and to my great indignation he answered, still dabbing

and flattening out his brushes in their lather of soap, 'What do you want with him?' My maid quite jumped with fright, and I, wishing to show my courage, said severely, 'That is what does not concern you.' Instead of showing the self-abasement which I thought my rebuke merited, he said amiably, still rubbing his brushes round and round: 'But yes, it does; for I'm the man you are looking for. What will you have?' I was so honestly discomfited that he kindly came to the rescue, and, overlooking my blunder, began to talk business. I have heard since that the mistake which I made had been so frequently made before that I suppose he scarcely noticed it."

As she ceased speaking, the readiness with which Martha took advantage of the pause to move toward the dining-room suddenly made her aware that dinner must have been announced,—how long ago she could not tell,—and that her garrulous speech and gesticulation had prevented her from hearing it. Her back was toward the door; but how excited she must have been, and appeared, not to have been aware of the announcement! Her face flushed, and she bit her lip with vexation.

Martha looked at her brother, supposing

that he would offer his arm to their guest. Instead of doing so, however, he merely stood aside and waited for the two ladies to go into the dining-room before him. In doing this, Sonia passed very near him; and with a feeling of defiance in her breast she looked straight at him.

He did not meet her gaze, however; for his own eyes were gravely lowered and hid behind a pair of heavy lids, the curves and lashes of which were startlingly familiar to her.

In the lull which the formalities of the moment occasioned, it was painfully borne in on Sonia that she had been too talkative. Her recent rapid speech smote annoyingly on her ears; and when she recalled the fact that she had done all the talking, and must have made an appearance of almost vulgar chattiness, she felt humiliated and indignant. Was she exposing her inward excitement to this quiet man, who was now giving some low-toned instructions to the butler with a self-possession which she suddenly envied? Feeling hurt and angry, she fell into utter silence.

A constraint had fallen upon the party which was even more marked than that which



"SONIA PASSED VERY NEAR HIM."



usually characterizes the first moments at a formal table. Sonia felt that she would bite her tongue in two before she would speak again, and Martha had a helpless sense that things were somehow going wrong. It was Harold who broke the silence.

"Martha," he said, "the princess will say, perhaps, what wine she prefers."

Sonia felt as if she hated him. He knew all her little aversions and preferences as well as she knew them herself, and had ordered her dinners and wines times out of number. How could he pretend that he had never seen her before, with so much success as almost to impose upon herself? Was it really a dream? Which was the dream, the past or the present? How could he seem to be so indifferent, unless he really felt so? Perhaps he was. That might be the simple explanation of what seemed mysterious.

As these thoughts hurried through her mind while she made a pretense of eating her soup, it suddenly occurred to her that her present complete silence might look as odd as her former garrulousness. Harold, while eating his dinner with apparent relish, was doing all the talking now, but with how different a manner

from hers! How quiet he was, and what well-bred pauses interspersed his talk, and how agreeably he deferred to Martha and herself, and brought them into it! She had come to this dinner with the proudest confidence of being able to conform the conditions about her absolutely to her will, and yet, in spite of herself, she seemed to be sinking deeper and deeper every moment into the slough of regret and self-reproach which she had come here to get out of.

As the meal proceeded, her self-dissatisfaction increased, and presently, with a feeling almost of panic, she realized that her conduct must be so peculiar as to cause surprise to Martha, if not to her brother. What interpretation would be put upon the sudden dumbness that possessed her? A very obvious one occurred to her, which it filled her with anger to think of, and she felt she must talk, must recover herself, must do away with the impression of her present stupidity.

Martha, groping about for an agreeable topic, had mentioned the young bridal couple, and a telegram which she had just received from them, and that led her to some remarks about the wedding.

"Oh, it was a beautiful wedding—I was there!" said Sonia, in a breathless endeavor to come naturally into the talk.

As she spoke she met Harold's eyes, and thought that she discovered just a shade of surprise in them. He only bowed, however, in assent to her rather demonstrative expression of praise. Sonia felt at once that her attendance at any wedding, particularly that one, was a thing that grated on him. His presence there was, of course, a necessity; but the odious taste of her going, out of pure curiosity, as it would appear to him, to see this marriage, must add one more item to the evidence which was rolling up against her. She was experiencing what was new to her—a sensation of total inadequacy to the social demands of her surroundings.

"Harold, do you think you can possibly stay for the opening of the Salon?" said Martha, presently, in another effort to make the conversation go. This was a topic which she thought Sonia should be interested in. Apparently she was right.

"I'm going to exhibit a picture," said Sonia, quickly.

Sonia had thought only of recovering her-

self by talking naturally, and this speech, as well as the last one, she regretted bitterly the moment she had uttered it. Not only did it seem in bad taste to speak of her exhibiting, when Martha was so far removed from such an honor, but it might also make the impression that she thought that the fact might be an inducement for him to stay for the Salon. It was maddening to have him look at her again with polite interest, and express his congratulations upon a fact of which she now felt heartily ashamed. How he must despise her ! What should she do ?

“ I wonder,” said Martha, at this point, in her clear, low voice, “ if Harold has ever seen that striking picture that hangs in your room, Sonia. It is Watts’s ‘ Hope,’ Harold. Do you know it ? ”

Harold answered that he did not, and Sonia’s sense of helpless misery increased as she perceived that Martha was going to describe it. She bit her tongue to keep from crying out as Martha proceeded to give the following description :

“ It is a woman’s figure lying on the globe in an attitude of fatigue and dejection. The scantily draped form is beautiful, but not youth-

ful-looking, and the face, partly concealed by a bandage over the eyes, is also beautiful, but lined with care and sorrow. In her hands she holds an old lyre with every string broken except one. This one string, frayed and worn and lax, she is striking with her thin, weak fingers, and she is bending her dulled ears to try to catch the note. When Sonia first showed it to me, and said that it was one of her favorite pictures, I did not understand it. We have all been taught at Etienne's such a fine contempt for English art that I was disposed to treat it lightly. I soon saw, however, the wonderful, tragic meaning in the picture, and I quite long to see the original."

This was too much. Sonia felt that if anything else occurred to hold her up to contempt in this man's eyes, she should give up, and burst into tears. Her courage was fast oozing to the last ebb; and with a feeling of actual desperation she looked involuntarily into the face of her opposite neighbor, and met his eyes fixed on her with a strong gaze that in an instant supported and calmed her. She did not quite read its meaning, but she felt that there was kindness for her in it, and that there was no contempt. A look from him had given her

courage many a time in the past, and it was availing now. She felt suddenly self-possessed and strong; but the remainder of the meal was a confused blur in her memory, and she was devoutly thankful when her maid came to fetch her home.

Martha thought it a little strange that her brother did not go down to put their guest into her carriage; but she reflected that he was far more familiar with the rules of foreign society than she was, and she concluded that he must be acting in accordance with them.

XII

MARTHA felt herself genuinely surprised, puzzled, and disappointed at the result of the meeting which she had worked so hard to bring about. Nothing could be more incontestably evident than that her brother and her friend had not proved sympathetic — did not “hit it off.” What was the reason? How could both of them be so perfectly congenial to her and still uncongenial to each other? It was a painful mystery, to which she tried in vain to find the key.

Next morning Sonia did not come to the atelier at her usual time, and Martha painted on without her in pronounced despondency of spirit. When she had quite given the princess up, she looked around, and, to her delight, saw Sonia placing her easel, and preparing to go to work, a short distance off. She thought her friend looked a little pale and ill; but when she managed presently to catch her eye,

she received an affectionate smile from her, which gave her a certain amount of reassurance.

When the interval for lunch came, and they went off together to the *crémérie*, Martha waited for her friend to introduce the subject so near to her heart, and was surprised when she led the talk in an entirely different direction.

It had been much the same with Harold after their guest had left the evening before. Beyond a rather preoccupied and spiritless assent to all she had to say about the beauty of the princess, he had seemed more or less indifferent on the subject, and had plunged with zest into the discussion of other things. Martha could not altogether wonder at this, for she had never seen her adored friend appear to so little advantage. Her brother, however, had seemed to her charming, though not, of course, at his very best, and she expected that Sonia would at least say that he was handsome and agreeable. When it appeared that she was going to say nothing at all, Martha boldly took the initiative, and asked:

“What do you think of Harold?”

“Think of him? Oh, I think he’s very

good-looking, though less like his sister than I could wish."

"Oh, Sonia, don't tease me! If I thought you meant that, I should give you up, both as an artist and a friend. But, really, did you like him or not?"

"I could hardly say 'not' to that heartfelt appeal," said Sonia, smiling; "and, indeed, I don't feel inclined to. I liked him, of course. But, my dear, I told you only the truth when I said I was sick to death of men. Etienne is the solitary exception. I like him for the reason that he did say a decent word to me this morning, and I really believe he thinks I am beginning to daub with promise."

Martha saw that there was no hope, so with profound disappointment she gave up, and said no more.

As for Sonia herself, never had she been in a state of such abject self-abasement. She had donned her gorgeous raiment and gone off to that dinner in exultant self-confidence, and had never doubted her ability to conform circumstances to her will, and to make exactly the impression upon Harold which she desired him to have. What, then, was the secret of her complete and humiliating failure? She asked her-

self this question, and immediately tried to shut fast her ears to the answer which her heart gave. She had confidently believed, up to this hour of her life, that her woman's pride was strong enough for any demands which she could possibly make upon it; but it had failed her. She had passed a sleepless night after that dinner, and it took tremendous effort to go to her work next morning. She did it only because she knew that if she did not the news of her absence would reach Harold, and she could not endure the thought of the motive to which he might attribute it. Perhaps the most poignant recollection which rankled in Sonia's mind was the thought that, in her helplessness, she had made an appeal to him by that look which he had answered with such strength-giving kindness. It had enabled her to get through with the remaining time; but now, as she thought of it, she felt that he had taken it as an appeal of weakness which he had been strong and merciful enough to respond to.

This thought, whenever it recurred, made her cheeks tingle.

And what could she do to right herself? She dared not make any more self-confident plans,

only to have them end in fresh humiliation. She now felt afraid of seeing Harold, and it seemed to her that the utmost that was in her power was to be regular and faithful to her work, in the hope that the report of such a sensible course would reach his ears.

Martha made a weak little effort to get her friend to come to her again, but to this she received such a faint response that she let the subject drop. All sorts of conjectures were busy in her mind to account for the present phenomena. She even wondered if she and her brother, with their American education and ideas, could have done anything which offered an affront to the state and dignity of their princess-guest. But this could hardly be. Sonia was as friendly and affectionate as ever, though she now seemed to wish to confine their intercourse to the limits of the atelier, and did not even ask her to come to her own apartments. So Martha was free to give up all her spare time to her brother, and they had numerous trips to the theater and opera; but somehow the *solitude à deux* with her beloved Harold had not the zest in it which she had counted on beforehand. He was certainly changed, this brother of hers. He had grown

more serious, and was given to long silences. She even thought that it was an effort to him to be so much in her society, and that he would perhaps prefer to be alone. This was a hard blow to Martha, but she bore it without making a sign, and was glad of the excuse which her work gave her to be much away from him. He also had important business in Paris, and often worked for many hours at a time, which, as Martha told herself, accounted for his rather careworn expression. She even thought he was getting thin, and begged him not to stay on because of her, as she would far rather give up her lessons and join her mother than be a trouble and injury to him. This, however, he would not listen to, and he even declared it his intention to stay in Paris until after the opening of the Salon, now only a week or so off.

Day after day went by, and although Sonia and Martha were together at least one half of their conscious time, they seemed to have in some way gone backward instead of forward in their intimacy. They still lunched together daily, and had ample opportunity for talk; but there seemed now a dearth of topics such as they had never been aware of before, and a

sense of distance had arisen which made it hard for Martha to realize the familiarity and nearness which had marked their former intercourse.

One afternoon, when the work had been going more than usually well, and the model had been more than usually interesting, Sonia and Martha, their easels side by side, had lingered in the atelier after every one else had gone. It was very agreeable to be able to paint and talk together, and the princess, whose carriage had been announced some time before, gladly agreed to wait with Martha until hers should arrive.

While they were talking, a knock was heard at the door, and as all rules were relaxed at this hour, both women called out, "*Entrez!*"

The door was opened, and around the corner of the old sail-cloth screen the tall figure of Harold appeared. The day was raw and chilly, and he wore a fur-lined coat with its large fur collar drawn close around his throat, and carried his high hat and his stick in his hand.

At sight of him Martha uttered a little exclamation of pleasure, and gaily called to him

to come on. Sonia, in spite of the jerk at her heart-strings and the rush of blood through all her veins, felt, taken unprepared as she was, a sudden sense of strength and self-possession. Her color deepened, and by a swift motion she drew herself erect; and as she stood there in her old green skirt and red silk blouse, she looked so workman-like and charming that, as Martha drew her brother forward toward their easels, her heart quite glowed with pride in both her dear companions. She always adored Harold in that coat, and Sonia in that dress, and her sensitive organism seemed to be receiving impressions of pleasure from the minds of each. Harold stood still, a little distance off, and bowed, with a look that expressed some hesitation or uncertainty. Looking past his sister and at her friend, he said:

“Do you permit me to look at your work?”

“Oh, if you care to,” said Sonia in a light and natural tone. “It ’s a mere daub of a study. One goes through a great deal of discouragement in a place like this, and a great deal of one’s time is spent in acquiring a knowledge of one’s ignorance. After that is quite mastered, things get easier. I think I

may say that I have graduated in that branch of study, and am now ready to go on to the more advanced ones."

Harold stood still, and looked at her picture. She was thinking how natural it would be to ask him if he thought she had improved. He was thinking how natural it would be to tell her that she had. Martha was thinking how beautiful and full of charm they both were, and almost wishing that the atelier could be filled with students to look at such models.

It occurred to her now that Harold remained silent unnecessarily long, and she was afraid that he did not appreciate her friend's work; so she herself began to speak in voluble praise of it.

Sonia felt a strong impulse to check her, and to explain to her that he was always silent when he really liked a thing exceedingly, and that she therefore felt delighted that he said nothing.

Harold, however, forced himself to utter a few words of praise that sounded very stiff and conventional, and a sort of bewildered look, which Martha could not understand, came into his eyes. Sonia understood it by its reflec-

tion in her own heart. She felt as if she were in some strange, confusing dream, where the conditions around her were sad and constrained, and yet which she felt she must hold on to and keep conscious of, lest they should vanish and leave her utterly empty-hearted, estranged, and desolate. While Martha exhibited her own work, and proceeded to pick it to pieces in imitation of what Etienne would say to-morrow, the man and woman standing behind her, so near that they almost touched, were feeling, from this proximity, a force that went to the very deeps of both their natures. Hardness, resentment, wounded pride, regret—all these were parts of this force in each; but there was in it, too, something stronger than any of them, something that warned Sonia that she had better not trust herself, at the same moment that Harold turned abruptly away, and said that he had an engagement, and could not wait longer. He explained in a hurried, confused speech, out of which it was hard to get any intelligent meaning, that he had forgotten Martha's need of the carriage, and had kept it waiting somewhere for him, which was his excuse for coming to the atelier to see if she had waited or was gone.

Martha saw by his manner that something was wrong, and made haste to put up her brushes, and follow him into the cloak-room, insisting that Sonia should come also, as she objected to leaving her there alone.

Sonia obediently did as she was told, but she felt as if she were stumbling along half blindly, and had not the will-power to object or protest.

She put on her hat, and was reaching for her heavy cloak, when a strong, brown hand, specked with two small dark moles just below the thumb, took it down from the peg, and folded it around her.

As she reached to draw to the collar, her hand touched his. If the sight of that hand had been familiar to her, what was its touch? She felt herself trembling, and her quick breaths almost suffocated her. She had just power to control herself until she was in her carriage, and alone. Then, falling back upon the cushions, her eyes closed, and she passed into a state of semi-consciousness.

She did not really faint, for she was all the time aware that the necessity for self-control was for the moment gone, and that she could rest, and cease to fight.

Long before the carriage stopped at her own door she had recovered, and realized it all. She knew that, miserable as the last two years had been, she had gradually been gaining strength, and recovering her power for the struggle of life. She might have gone on, and met the future bravely, if she had never seen this man again. Not now, however—not after she had heard his voice, and met his eyes, and touched his hand. This encounter had deprived her of her strength so absolutely that she longed only for the safety to be found in flight.

But how would that sudden flight appear to him? That was the question.

XIII

SONIA found herself, after that meeting, in a state of helpless irresolution. She could take no action. She could not even make plans. She could only drift. There was only one solace—work; and she was now generally the last person at the atelier, staying there until the light failed. She had got over all her timidity about being there after the others. The old concierge was apt to put her head in now and then, to nod to her, and give her a sense of protection; and sometimes she would come in and chat with her, while she was doing such sketchy sort of tidying up as an atelier admits of.

A few days had gone by without her having seen or heard of Harold. Martha seemed to divine that the princess wanted to talk only of her work and her atelier interests, and had tacitly adapted herself to her friend. They often worked together now, after regular hours,

but Martha generally found it necessary to go before her friend was ready.

One afternoon Martha had left rather earlier than usual, in order to keep an appointment with her brother, and Sonia was at work all alone, save for the companionship of her little terrier Inkling—a tiny, jet-black creature that wore a collar of little silver bells, which, Sonia had amused Martha by saying, had caused some one to give him the name of “Tinkling Inkling.” She did not often bring her pet to the atelier, for fear he might be troublesome. This afternoon, however, she knew that Etienne would not be there; and when the little fellow, palpitating with eagerness, had looked at her beseechingly from the seat of the carriage where she had just shut him in, she had suddenly snapped her fingers and twisted her lips into a sound of encouragement, and he had leaped out of the carriage window, and followed her with an air of perfect understanding that this unusual privilege made a demand on him to be on his best behavior.

He had been propriety itself all the afternoon, and Sonia had seen and appreciated his heroic self-control in not barking at the model, whom he had looked at with inveterate disap-

proval, only expressed by one little whispered growl. The class of society to which the model belonged were Inkling's natural enemies; and whether, in spite of nudeness, he recognized this man as a member of that class, or whether the nudeness itself outraged his sense of propriety, certain it was that, during all the hours in which his mistress was painting, Inkling lay at her feet, with his eyes fixed unwinkingly upon his enemy, ready to take advantage of the first excuse to fly at him.

No such occasion had arisen, however; and now the model was gone, and Inkling, off duty at last, was enjoying the reaction of a sound nap at his mistress's feet.

The room was so profoundly still that Sonia was startled by a rap at the door, gently though it was given. Even Inkling did not wake at it. She looked up from her easel, expecting to see her footman come to announce the carriage, or some workman delivering supplies for the atelier, and saw, instead, Harold Keene standing only a few feet from her. She knew that the swing-door had closed behind him, and that they were alone together. Her heart shook, and for a moment she could not speak. He came forward a little, and said in French :

"I beg your pardon, princess. I came for my sister to fill an engagement. Is she not here?"

"She has just gone," answered Sonia, also in French. "She expected to meet you at the apartment."

"I have just been there. Not finding her, I came on here. I suppose I passed her on the way."

Inkling had opened his eyes at the sound of voices, but, seeing that the model-throne was empty and his enemy gone, he had not troubled himself further. As Harold ceased speaking, a look of sudden interest came over the dog, and he got up, his little bells a-tinkle, and trotted across to where Harold stood.

No sooner had he looked at him than he uttered a gruff bark of surprise, and no sooner had he snuffed once at the legs of his trousers than he grew frantic with excitement. He barked and yelped, and jumped up on him with such evidences of wild delight that no man with a kind heart in his bosom could have refused some recognition of such a welcome.

Harold stooped and patted him, speaking to him in English.

Somehow, to have him treat a dog like that, and to address her in cold formality, in a foreign language, by a pompous title which did not belong to her, seemed to Sonia wilfully cruel.

Inkling, still frantic with delight, left Harold, and rushed over to her, yelping and barking, and shaking his tail violently, looking up in her face with eloquent insistency. Then he ran back to Harold, and again back to her, with fluttering agitation.

Sonia's spirit did not falter, however, and her voice was firm and steady as she said in English:

"Why do you speak to Inkling in English, and to me in French?"

"Because Inkling and I are old friends, who have a common language, while the Princess Mannernorff is a stranger and a foreigner."

"It seems very childish to keep up that farce."

"I thought it was your wish."

"And you despise me, probably, for the deception I have practised in passing myself off for the Princess Mannernorff! I did not do it deliberately," she said, with an almost child-like air of contrition and confession. "It has

hurt me all along to be deceiving Martha ; but some one told her I was a Russian princess, and as my mother had been one before her marriage, and my aunt, with whom I live, is the Princess Mannernorff, I let the false impression remain, and even took advantage of it. It was wrong, I know ; but I did want to hold on to Martha's friendship a little longer. However," she said, her face and voice hardening, " it is simply a question of time ; and a few weeks sooner or later, what does it matter?"

" Why is it a question of time ? " said Harold. " Why should you not keep that friendship always, if you care for it ? Martha shall know nothing from me."

There was a moment's silence. Then Sonia said :

" I thought it possible that you might disapprove of our friendship."

" Why should I ? It is a thing absolutely between Martha and yourself."

" She would cast me off immediately if she knew the truth, and any moment an accident may reveal it to her."

" Such an accident is most unlikely. It could, as things are now, come about only through me, and I shall be on my guard."

How confident and strong he was! It roused all the pride in her. The sense of weakness which had overcome her at their last meeting, and which for a moment had threatened her in this one, was utterly gone.

"Besides," went on Harold, quickly, "I believe you are wholly wrong in thinking that she would give you up if, by chance, she should discover what you have so carefully guarded from her. I see no reason why she should."

He had spoken in English, since she had criticized his using French, and Inkling seemed at least partly satisfied, as he stood midway between the two, with his front legs wide apart, as if to keep his body firm, while his tail wriggled wildly, and his head turned from one to the other with a quickness which was enough to make him dizzy. He was alertly aware of them, but they had both forgotten him, in the keen absorption in each other which underlay their outward composure.

"Have you, then, told her nothing?" said Sonia, in answer to his last words.

"Only the simple fact."

"What fact?" she said, looking him in the face with a certain hardness and defiance.

"That the woman whom I had loved no longer loved me ; that she had repudiated my name and every connection with me, and had asked for a divorce, which I was taking all possible steps to give her as soon as it could be done."

"And do you think that Martha, feeling as she does, would continue the acquaintance of a woman who had cast off her brother with no stronger reason than that?"

"It was sufficient for me. There could not be a stronger reason for divorce than absence of love on either side."

"The world does not agree with you," she said.

"Yet I fancy Martha would. If it came to remarriage on either side, her verdict would perhaps be condemnation ; but I think she would consider separation a higher thing than a loveless marriage."

Somehow, there was a spirit in these words that touched her heart. Her voice, for the first time, was a little unsteady as she said :

"You do believe that, at least ! You do feel that I could never think of another marriage !"

"I have always felt it. Indeed, I may say

I have known it. I know that you see the inevitableness of all this as clearly as I do. I have often wished, for your sake, that I had never seen you, to put this blight upon your life."

"And have not I also blighted yours? Do you suppose that I never think of that?"

"It need not trouble you, if you do. In my case there was a compensation, and a sufficient one. In your case there is none."

She knew what he meant; that his love for her, and that happy month of marriage, had been enough to pay him for having afterward lost her; and she knew that he held the fact that she had never really loved him to have barred her from any compensation at all. Why did she so resent his assuming this? Had she not told him, in language of such emphatic decision that it rang even now in her ears, that she had found out that she had made a great mistake, and that she had never loved him? He had simply taken her at her word.

She wilfully ignored the true meaning of his last words, as she went on:

"It is a mistake to think that my life has no compensations. My work, whether it ever

amounts to anything or not, is a great compensation. The friendship of Martha is another. You are very good to wish not to take that from me; but the present sham conditions cannot be kept up after we separate. Fortune has favored us almost miraculously as it is. She heard that there was a Russian princess studying here, and some one mistakenly pointed me out for her. I had already seen her name on her canvases, and knowing that your mother and sisters were in Paris, of course I knew exactly who she was. Independent of this, her face and manner had strongly attracted me, so I saw no reason why we might not be friends, provided I could keep from her who I was. As soon as I saw that she believed me to be the princess, the fact that my aunt was a Russian and had Russian servants opened the way to my carrying on the idea; and so far there has been no trouble. My little Russian name for Sophia helped me, too. If she had known me as Sophia or Sophie, she would probably have recoiled from me, even if she had had no suspicion as to my identity."

"I beg you not to have that thought," said Harold. "If the time ever comes when the

truth must be declared to Martha, let me be the one to tell her; and I promise you there shall be no recoil — no lessening of her friendship for you."

"Thank you," said Sonia, coldly. "You were always a generous man."

Her tone smote discordantly upon Harold. It seemed a sort of compulsory tribute to him, which he had no fancy for from her.

"I am thinking of Martha, too," he said. "She is very lonely in her life, and rarely goes out to any one, in spite of her ardent nature. This friendship with you is very valuable to her, and I am anxious that nothing shall disturb it."

"Thank you for correcting me," returned the other, quickly; "though I did not really suppose that it was for my sake that you were willing to take so much trouble."

She knew that this speech was silly, petulant, and unworthy of her, but she wished him to understand that she asked and expected nothing of him. He could not be so cool and steady during this interview unless he had ceased to care for her. She quite realized that he had, and she wished him to know that she accepted it as a matter of course.

Inkling, meantime, had grown very uneasy. He felt that things were not going well, and he now began to show symptoms of distress, instead of the wild delight of the moment before. He ran whimpering from one to the other; and when they took no notice of him, he sprang upon the lap of his mistress, and, uttering the most expressive complaints and beseechings, tried to lick her face. Sonia, in a fit of irritation very characteristic of her, gave him a hard little slap, which sent him out of her lap, whining, and running to Harold for pity. He was not really hurt; and she felt cross with the clever little brute for posing as a victim so successfully.

“Don’t touch him!” she cried imperatively to Harold. “He’s only pretending to get your pity. You sha’n’t pat him or speak to him. If you do, I’ll be very angry.”

The effect which these words had upon Harold would have surprised her, could she have known it. They were so like her, so absolutely herself, that they brought back the past with a rush; and it seemed such a hollow pretense to suppose that they were separated, and compelled to be as strangers to each other, that he came nearer to losing his head than he had done yet.

Ignoring Inkling's fawnings and complaints, he said suddenly :

"I am forgetting that Martha is waiting for me"; and then, changing his tone, and speaking in French, he added :

"May I take you to your carriage, princess?"

She answered him in French, as prompt and easy as himself. She thanked him for his offer, but declined it, saying that her servant would let her know when her carriage arrived. She added that she was not ready to leave the atelier yet, as she had lost time, which she must now make up.

He bowed in silence, turned, and walked away. Inkling made a weak effort to follow him, but was scared into a sudden and humiliated return by the imperious command of his mistress. The little creature looked so ridiculously distressed, as he sat on his haunches near her, with his ears dropped and his tail nerveless and still beneath him, that Sonia's irritation deepened as she put up her brushes and paints; and when she had washed her hands and was emptying the basin, she yielded to a sudden impulse and dashed half the meager supply of water over him.

“There, you little idiot!” she said crossly. “That ’s for your ridiculous nonsense in trying to make out that I care one pin for him, or anything about him. I ’ll very soon convince *him* that I don’t; and if ever *you* dare to act in such a way again, I ’ll sell you to the concierge on the spot!”

Inkling gave every indication of a complete understanding of this threat, which had the effect of bringing him at once to a state of cowed dejection.

XIV

SONIA said nothing to Martha of that meeting and conversation at the atelier; and as Martha made no reference to it, she understood that Harold also had been silent on the subject.

A few days went by, which were fraught with agitation to the pupils at Etienne's, as they were the last days of April, and two or three of the atelier students were to exhibit in the Salon. Sonia's picture had been entered under a fictitious name, rather against her master's wishes; but he had found it impossible to move her on this point. She had made both Etienne and Martha promise her most solemnly to tell no one which was her picture; and so she looked forward to the great exhibition with a pleasure which had no disturbing element in it.

This pleasure had, however, grown paler recently, as her hold on all outward things,

slight as she had thought it before, had grown weaker. She had felt a real emotion when told that her picture had been admitted by the jury, and an intense anxiety as to how it would be hung. In contrast to this was the languid interest which she experienced when she found that it was on the line.

Martha and she had gone to the *Vernissage* on the thirtieth of April, and had stood before the picture together; but it was Martha who had flushed and fluttered with delight at the remarks upon it which they had overheard. Sonia herself seemed to have lost interest in it.

On the morning of the *Vernissage* Harold had gone to London, to be absent until the next day, when he was to take Martha to the formal opening of the Salon.

There was, therefore, no reason why Sonia should not accept her friend's invitation to dine and spend the evening. When she saw what pleasure her acceptance gave the girl, her heart suddenly smote her with the reflection that she did very little to reward such ardent love, and she impetuously offered to spend the night also, saying that she had not done such a thing since her school-days.

Martha was overjoyed ; and when Sonia duly arrived, prepared to spend the night, the two women made a great effort to get the amount of enjoyment which they felt ought to be for each in their *tête-à-tête* dinner and evening together. Their talk, however, seemed rather desultory and unproductive, and both of them felt that their endeavors to return to their former attitude of free and natural mutual confidence were strangely unavailing.

After a rather dull discussion of Paris apartment-houses, and their advantages and disadvantages, Martha proposed to show her guest over this one ; and Sonia went with her into all the rooms, with a civil effort to seem interested, until she came to one on the threshold of which Martha said :

"This is the girls' room, which Harold has now. It is just next to mama's, which is the one you have. The governess has a room on the other side of the salon, in order to protect me. They tell such frightful stories about the crimes and murders in these Paris apartments that I used to be quite timid, though I've got over it now."

Sonia, while she appeared to be listening to her companion, was in reality so inwardly

shaken by certain influences received in this room that she felt as if her mind were staggering. On the dressing-table just in front of her were several toilet articles in old German silver which it seemed to her that she had seen and touched but yesterday. A clothes-brush with fantastic decorations of women's figures, entwined with fish and garlands of roses, had a large dent in it, of which she knew the whole history. She could even have told why one of the three bottles in the leather-case was without a stopper, and what had become of the smallest pair of scissors, the place of which in the dressing-case was empty. On a table near by was a leather portfolio with the letters "H. R. K." on one corner in a silver monogram.

While Martha moved about the room and talked, Sonia's eyes searched eagerly among the familiar objects for certain others which she would have given the world to see. Her search was in vain, however. There was not one thing of his own in sight which had not been a possession of his bachelor days. This was quite evident, and of course was entirely as it should be.

When they returned to the salon, Martha,

observing that her friend looked tired, proposed that they should go to bed early—an idea received with evident favor. They were quite safe in the protection of the man-servant, who had been brought with the family from America. Harold had given him orders to sleep for the night in the antechamber, and Martha had one of the maids in the room back of hers. When she asked her guest if she felt at all timid, and saw the smile of amused denial that answered her, she went with her to her room, lingered a few moments to see that all was comfortable about her, then kissed and embraced her friend, and said good night.

Left alone, Sonia stood an instant silent in her place; then, with movements of swift decision, she locked the door by which Martha had gone out, and, crossing the room to another door, softly turned the handle. She had her bedroom candle in her hand, and as the door yielded and opened, she passed into the room beyond it, and stood still once more, as if possessed by that presence from out the past.

The lights in this room had been put out, and all the doors and windows closed. She knew that she was safe in her solitude, and

need no longer struggle with the feelings which crowded her heart.

She went to the dressing-table, and took up the old clothes-brush, and put her lips to the dent which she herself had made there once, by using the brush as a hammer. Then silently dashing away the heavy tears that rolled from her eyes, she looked closely at the grotesque figures of women and fish, and recalled such amusing things which had been said about them that she began to laugh, even while more tears were gathering, and straining her throat with pain. The nervous little laugh died away as she pressed the brush again to her lips. Then she lifted, one by one, all the familiar objects that lay before her, and looked at them, while her tears fell like rain.

Presently she took up the portfolio from the table near by, and turned over the thick sheets of blotting-paper within. She could see plainly the inverted and almost illegible, but characteristic, impression of a woman's writing. In some places this was lost in very different characters, but in others it was distinctly recognizable. She walked to the dressing-table with it, and held it before the mirror, and read distinctly in one place the words, "Yours al-

ways, Sophie," and in another, "Yours faithfully, Sophia Keene." Her heart trembled. She had no idea to whom she had so signed herself, but she wondered passionately if Harold had ever tried this experiment, and seen those signatures from the faithless woman who had been his wife.

Suddenly she put the book back on the table, and fell on her knees before it, laying her face upon its pages, and sobbing upon them until they were saturated with her tears; for, underneath her own handwriting, she had seen, reflected in the glass, writing which seemed almost as familiar, in which she had deciphered the words, "Your loving husband."

She had destroyed every word of that handwriting which she had ever possessed, and thousands of times her heart had hungered to see it in these very words. It was upon this spot that her lips were laid now, while they whispered out, in inarticulate sobs and gasps, words of heartbroken pain.

She had told him that she did not love him, and had demanded a divorce from him. She must never contradict those words, or try to undo that act. She knew that she was weak,

but she knew that she had courage enough to stand to this resolution. He should never know how, slowly at first, and afterward with increasing force and swiftness, the knowledge of her mistake had come to her. For a while she had fought it off with furious denial. She had argued and talked with herself, and recalled past feelings of resentment, anger, and desperate antagonism, to prove to herself that she had been right in vowing that she did not love him; but in the end nothing had availed. Long before their paths had met again she had known that she was wrong; that she had made a hideous mistake of her life; and that, with all the force, fire, energy, and passion of her heart, she loved the man whom she had repudiated. But, even with this knowledge, she might have borne it, she might have lived and died without making a sign, if only she had not seen him again!

Now, however, that she had seen him, heard him, felt the atmosphere of his presence about her, felt his thoughts of her surrounding her, and felt through all her pulses his touch upon her hand, what was she to do? How was she to stumble on, and pretend to fight, when a mere look from his eyes made her sword-arm nerveless?

Oh, she *must* give way this once, she felt, and shed a few of those millions of pent-up tears! Now that she was here in the very room that he had slept in yesterday, and would come back to to-morrow, she must let the spirit of love and grief within her have its way. Perhaps some remnant of it might linger after she was gone, and speak to his heart from hers.

As her mind formed this idea, she sprang to her feet. Was she losing control of herself? Was her mind weakening or deserting her? How had she so forgotten herself as to have this thought, which was in its nature a wish? She knew that in her proper senses she would choose to die a death of torture rather than that he should have one suspicion of her feeling for him. No, no! She passionately recanted that moment's impulsive wish as she took her candle, and, more tranquil now, went over and stood by his bed.

It was not swathed in a great cretonne cover, as French beds are apt to be, but was made in the American fashion, with smooth white coverlet and fair linen sheets. Still holding the candle in her hand, she sank on her knees beside this bed, and closed her eyes, and moved

her lips in prayer. Her long hair was hanging in a thick mass down her back. The white gown that she wore was almost as plain as a religious habit, and she looked, with her taper burning in front of her, like a nun before a shrine.

She felt a certain power of renunciation come into her, and a strength to do what right and duty demanded. She rose from her knees, and bent over the bed, and for a moment laid her cheek against the cool white pillow. Oh, might God be very good to him, she prayed ! Might He make up to him for all the pain and grief and woe that she had caused him ; and some time in heaven might he come to know how wholly and completely she had loved him !

She felt a sense of inward calm and strength as she turned from the bed, crossed the room, and entered her own apartment, closing and locking the door behind her.

This peace was on her still as she presently went to bed, and fell almost immediately into a dreamless sleep.

XV

SONIA was awakened early by sounds in the room next her own, and as she opened her eyes with perfect recollection of all that had passed the night before, she wondered if it could possibly be that Harold had returned. It might be only the maid opening and airing the room ; but whatever it was, she could not sleep again, and she began to devise a plan for getting away early, so that she might avoid the possibility of meeting Harold. She got out of bed, parted the curtains, and opened the casement of the low French window. The early sunshine had washed everything with its faint golden glow, and the little new-born leaves that covered the trees in the *place* with a foliage of feathery green, paler than ever in its transparence against the sun, made a delicate filmy screen, through which she looked down on an exquisite moving picture.

The doors of the beautiful, great Madeleine

were open wide, and through them was pouring a long white rivulet that seemed to have its source in the little covered doorway in the side of the basement of the great building, and flowed thence in an even stream around the corner, and up the great steps of the building, passing between its central pillars, and so into the interior of the church. This stream was composed of what seemed an unending number of little girls dressed for their first communion. They were all in spotless white, with thin, transparent veils reaching to the hems of their gowns, white wreaths upon their heads, white stockings, shoes, and gloves, and each of them carried a tall white taper, to be presently lighted in the church. Stationed like sentinels along the line were gray-clad, white-bonneted sisters of charity, who directed the children's movements as they walked with an awed stateliness out of the little door, up to the corner and around it, and then through the gate and up the steps, and were lost to sight beyond the wide church-door.

Sonia could see the very expressions of their faces as they would look up for direction to the sisters as they passed, lifting their meek and timid glances with an air of solemnity

which in some instances struggled with a sense of pride in their unwonted paraphernalia. Somehow, the sight of so much ignorance, trust, and innocence, and the thought that each one of them possessed a woman's heart, with all its capacity for suffering, for hoping, for loving, for regretting, absolutely overcame her. How ignorant they were of what lay before them! How fearlessly their little feet were entering upon the long journey of life, so blind to the pains and bitterness of its way! It seemed heartrendingly cruel to her, to think how they must suffer from the mere fact that each one of them was a woman-child. O God, that women had to suffer so!—that even love, the one delight, should bring in its wake such pain! She could see none of the joy ahead of these sweet children; she thought only of what her own heart suffered now—the regret, the longing, the unfathomable sadness, the blight, the disappointment, the despair! The passionate pain of her heart broke forth in violent sobbing as she stood between the parted curtains, fascinated by the lovely sight, but scarcely able to see it for her tears.

“O God, have pity on them—have pity on them!” she sobbed aloud; and then, while her

whole frame shook with her violent weeping, she suddenly became aware of the stealing on of a new influence. What was it? Nothing so definite as sight or sound, but something subtly powerful in its significance to her. It was the pungent odor of a certain kind of cigar which had once made part of the familiar atmosphere of her life. It dominated her now, as if by a spell. She was instantly calmed, and, as if by magic, swept back into the thrilling past. Then, suddenly, penetrating this familiar atmosphere, there came a familiar sound—no articulate utterance, but just a sound in the throat, which seemed somehow meant to challenge attention. She would have known that voice in the most distant and unlikely spot of earth; and now it became quite plain to her that Harold had returned, and was watching the scene opposite from his open window, scarcely a yard away.

He must have heard her words and sobs! He must have understood them, he was so well practised in reading her heart. It had been an open book to him once, though now it must be forever locked and sealed.

Her hands had fallen from the curtains, and

she had moved backward. There had seemed to come into her strength and support from the mere sound of that voice. There was nothing new in this. Often, often had she felt it before. And once it had been in her power to summon this support at will, in any hour of grief or trial. That power was gone now, never to come again; but for this once this supreme and availing help had been afforded her. She felt within her the power to be strong, to collect herself, and to form and execute plans of getting away from this place of temptation and danger.

She fell on her knees. Her soul uttered a prayer of mingled thanksgiving and entreaty. As she raised her eyes she could see through the slightly parted folds of the curtains the pointed arch that topped the Madeleine. Carved in enduring stone, that generations to come might see and gather comfort from it, was the gracious figure of Jesus, spreading out his arms of welcome to the poor Magdalen, who knelt in supplication at his feet. At his side was a glorious, great angel, who, with drawn sword, stood over the woman, and thrust back with his other hand the evil creatures who in vain besieged her.

On the right hand of Christ another angel, with wings at rest, held a great horn of triumph, and behind him were women crowned and garlanded, with little children clinging to them. Farther still was a woman on a bed of illness, over whom another angel of mercy had spread its wings as she came to Christ to have her body healed.

The center of it all was the beneficent figure of the human Saviour; and Sonia, looking down from this immutable image carved in stone, to the flowing, changing, passing stream of young human creatures beneath, felt calmed and comforted. So they could keep their childish faith, there was a refuge for them, and she saw them now without any prompting to tears.

She got up from her knees, bathed her face, smoothed her hair before the mirror, and then, after darkening the room a little, rang for the maid, and asked for her coffee.

By the time it came she was almost dressed, and she instructed the servants very carefully not to disturb her young mistress, but to call a cab for her at once,—as she found it necessary to go home early,—and to tell Martha, when the latter awoke, that she was very well,

but was obliged to be at home at a certain hour.

Her plan worked perfectly, and on her way to the cab she saw no one except the American maid, who went down with her. In passing through the antechamber she noticed a man's covert-coat, stick, and hat, together with some crushed newspapers, thrown on a sofa. But she had not needed this to convince her of the fact that Harold had returned, and had been in his room, watching, as she had watched, the stream of little girls beginning their celebration of the month of Mary by taking their first communion.

The first of May being also what is known as "Labor Day," it was a strange contrast to the unworldliness and other-worldliness of these little *religieuses* to see the alert military forces now beginning to fill the streets, in anticipation of possible insurrection and danger, of which there was strong menace that year.

Gendarmes in groups of six and eight, and sometimes even more, dotted the streets in all directions, and the mounted guard was out in full force. Sonia, looking from her cab window, heard repeated orders given to small groups of citizens to disperse. Even two men

were not permitted to stand and talk together, and she was conscious of a certain amusement at seeing two groups of gendarmes combine forces to separate these little knots of two and three. Occasionally there was some resistance, and she saw several arrests made, which frightened her. She felt lonely and unprotected, driving through the streets of Paris with an unknown cabman at that early hour, when there was even a possibility of such a horror as an insurrection of the French lower orders.

It came over her with piercing power how Harold would once have felt about her being in such a position, and how strange, how inexplicable, how unnatural, it was that it could be nothing to him now—that, even if he knew it, he would feel bound to accept it passively; for nothing, she was certain, could induce him to exercise the semblance of a right over her.

She got out of the cab at her own door, safe in body, but more excited and confused in mind than she had ever been in her life—and perhaps, in this moment, more wretched also.

XVI

HAROLD's condition of mind and feeling on that morning of the first of May was so complicated and perplexed that he felt for the first time in his life utterly unable to see his way. He was accustomed to having things, no matter how difficult, look definite to him. He had not hesitated in deciding on his sudden marriage with Sophia Rutledge, nor had he felt the least hesitation as to his course a month later, when she demanded a divorce from him. His path had been clear and open before him, and he had taken it unflinchingly. He felt the same ability to do, and the same courage to endure, now, if he could only see his way. He knew himself too well to suppose that, after having been married to this woman, he could ever love another, and he had quite decided to accept his life and to put the thought of happiness out of it. In making this decision he had had the strongest

possible conviction of the truth of his wife's declaration that she did not love him, and it was this which had made submission to her decision the only possible course for him. She was such a strong and resolute woman that he had imagined her, after the stern ordeal of the first few months of separation, going resolutely on, with her life adjusted to its new conditions; and although he was certain that her marriage, separation, and the coming divorce would make too deep marks in her womanly consciousness for her ever to think of marrying again, he quite believed that she was the calm and self-poised woman for which he knew nature had intended her.

It was therefore a great surprise to him, on meeting her again, to see such marked indications of indecision, nervousness, and lack of control. He felt that she often said and did what she had meant not to say and do, and he was aware that she was a prey to variability, fluctuation, and caprice. What did it mean? This was the question which he set himself to consider with all the concentration of his mind. He did not know — what was the truth — that these new qualities in her existed only with regard to himself, and that to

her aunt, her acquaintances, her servants, and all who came in contact with her, she was more than ever decided, self-collected, and even self-willed. If he could have known that, it would have let in light upon a subject and situation which seemed to him impenetrably dark. Every time that he had seen her she had left upon his mind a different impression. Sometimes he wondered if she could be ill, to account for such a change; and sometimes he told himself that it was an unpardonable demand upon her nervous endurance for him to come into her presence. Still, when he reflected, he had never thrust himself upon her, and on the only occasion when their meeting had not been accidental, it had been her deliberate doing. What must he conclude from this?

It would be conceit only which could make him think, after that, that she either feared or disliked to meet him. He certainly had no right to suppose that she sought or wished it. He must, therefore, conclude that she was quite indifferent to him, and wished him to accept that view of the case.

He tried hard to do this, but there was something in her manner and in his own con-

sciousness which positively prevented his holding to this idea. It was not that she appeared to him to be unhappy, but she did seem disturbed, restless and fitful. After his interview with her in the atelier, he felt that she had so definitely conveyed to him her wishes in the case that now he had only to follow them and to keep out of her way, so far as it rested with him to do so.

On this course he fully resolved; but her beauty, her voice, her movements, haunted him by day and night. He knew that he was as absolutely under her spell as he had ever been. He knew that a point might come when his self-control would be powerfully threatened, and then there would be nothing for it but to flee. He was not afraid of the consequences to himself which might lie in this betrayal of his past. He was thinking of her, and of the increased trouble which it would bring into her life if she should come to realize how he still loved her. This was a quite unnecessary trial for her, and one which he was resolved she should not have.

He had not known of any plan of Martha's for having her friend spend the night of his absence with her, so it took him completely

by surprise when he returned at an earlier hour than he had expected, and, inquiring of the man servant if all was well, was told that the Princess Mannernorff had dined and spent the night with his sister. He ascertained what room she was occupying, and when the servant, who carried his bag, went into his own room ahead of him, he reproved the man rather severely for opening the window with such a noise. Then immediately he sent the servant away.

He had seen, from below, the beginning of the little procession going into the Madeleine; and as he stood half unconsciously watching it, possessed by the thought that the woman who had once been his adored and adoring wife was asleep in the next room to him, he heard the window of that room open, and he knew that she was awake, and standing very near. He heard her draw the curtains back by the cords and rings above. He even heard the little effort in her breathing caused by the strong pull. Each of them, he knew, was looking at the same sight — the beautiful, moving panorama, seen through the flecks of sun-washed, young green leaves; but while she was thinking of those trustful and unconscious children, his

thoughts were wholly of her. His heart was filled with longings so intense and masterful as to crowd out everything else. Then, in a flash, his humor changed; for there came to him her stifled sobs, and her calls on God to pity them — those sweet, unknowing little ones, born to be suffering women. With his old swift comprehension of her, he knew why this sight had touched her so, and he realized what he had only dimly felt before, that she was a miserable woman, wearily walking a *via dolorosa*.

He did not ask to know what it might be. He longed only to help and comfort her. He could not speak, but at least he could let her know that he was near; and then it was that he had made the sound which Sonia had heard.

That sound was followed by silence. Was she perhaps indignant, he asked himself, that he should dare to make this demand upon her attention? She would have a right to be; for he could make no pretense that he had not deliberately intended to do this. Yet she was alone there, sad and troubled, and he was close at hand, with a heart that ached to comfort her. He could not have rested, feeling that she was unaware of his knowledge of her presence, and no matter what consequences to

himself the act might carry, he deliberately said to her in that sound: "I am here, and I know that you are there."

If she had made a sign in answer, he would have thanked God on his knees; but she had withdrawn from the window in silence, and he had felt only that she was gone.

An hour later, when the servant brought his coffee and the morning papers, he brought also the information that the princess had gone off alone some time before in a cab.

Harold felt, at hearing this, a perfect fury of anger and indignation. With the possibility of a riot in view, and the knowledge that ladies had been warned not to venture unprotected on the streets, it made his blood boil to think she—the delicate woman-spirit and woman-body that he knew so well—should have gone forth alone from under the very roof with him; and that even if he had known of it, he would have had no right to interfere. The legal right, of course, he had; but that fact only made it the more impossible for him to assert upon her any claim. Not all the laws that were ever made could have bound or loosed him so indomitably as did her wish and will. The fact that it was still within his power to assert a

legal claim upon her constituted in itself the strongest possible demand upon a man of his nature to leave her as free as air from any bondage or emancipation which could exist by any right but that of love. If she had loved him, he would have asserted his power and right to control and influence her. As she did not love him, there was no creature living who was so free from him as she — this woman whom once he had held in as binding fetters as ever love had forged.

XVII

ON reaching home, Sonia went immediately to her room, and sent word to her aunt that she was feeling ill, and desired not to be disturbed. Her maid brought her a message of condolence in reply, and she knew that she was now safe in her solitude for the remainder of the day.

She undressed quickly, threw on a loose dressing-gown, unfastened the thick coil of her hair, and then, telling her maid not to come to the room until she should ring, she threw herself at full length on the lounge, and lay there with her eyes closed, profoundly still. She had caused the blinds to be shut and the curtains drawn. The beautiful spring sunshine flooded everything without, but about her all was gloom and darkness. She could hear the whir of innumerable wheels and the click of horses' feet on the smooth pavement outside, and she knew that the streets were alive and abloom with

smartly dressed men and women in open carriages, driving between the long lines of flowering horse-chestnuts down the beautiful Champs Elysées to the Palais de l'Industrie.

Long ago she had ordered a charming costume for this occasion, selected with much care and thought; and it had come home more than a realization of her expectations. She had fancied that she would have pleasure in joining a party of friends, and perhaps lingering about the neighborhood of her own picture to hear any comments that might be made upon it. She had not allowed herself to hope that it would be on the line; but there it was this moment, as she knew; and the pretty gown and bonnet and parasol, all so painstakingly selected, were neatly put away, and she was lying nerveless in this lonely room.

She lay on her back, with her arms, from which the sleeves fell, thrown over her head, and her face turned to one side, so that her cheek rested against the smooth flesh of one inner arm. The folds of her scant gown lay thin and pliant over her long, slim figure, and the pointed toes of her little gray *mules* showed at the end of the lounge where her feet were crossed one over the other. To-day

she had given up the long, long struggle for self-control and strength. She abandoned herself absolutely to the dark, unbroken grief which she felt to be her only natural and honest life. She did not even long for happiness to-day: she longed only for the peace of death—the nothingness of the grave. Oh, to be taken so, without the need to stir or move, and lowered into a cool, deep, still grave,—breath, consciousness, hope, regret, memory, individuality, all, all gone,—and earth and grass and flowers over her! That instinct of weak self-pity, to which the strongest of us yield now and then, overcame the lethargy of her mood, and the springs of tears were touched. Two large drops rose and forced their way between her close-shut lids.

“O, what have I done, what have I done, to have to suffer so?” she whispered—“to have to give up all, all joy, and take only pain and misery and regret for all my life! It was only a mistake. It was no sin or crime that I committed when I sent him away, and said that I did not love him. It was only an awful, fatal, terrible mistake. I have feared so for a long, long time; but, oh! I know it now! I want him back—I want

him back ! I want his love, and his patience, and his care. I want him for my friend, and my protector, and my husband. And though I want him so, I am farther away from him than if I had never seen him. When this hideous divorce is got, and our beautiful marriage has been undone, any other woman in the world might hope to win his love. I shall be the one free woman on earth to whom that hope would be shame and outrage and humiliation. O my God, help me, help me ! Show me what to do. Give me back at least my pride, that I may not have to suffer his contempt. O God Almighty, if his love for me is quite, quite dead, in mercy let my love for him die too ! Oh, no — no — no ! My God, I take it back ! I do not ask it. I do not want to stop this agony of pain that comes from loving him. O God of pity and compassion, give me now a little help, and show me what to do. Kill me now — strike me dead, O God — rather than let me do anything to cause him to despise me ! ”

She buried her face in her hands, and went on, speaking between her fingers in thick, sobbing whispers.

“ God did not hold me back before from

cutting my own throat," she said; "and yet I prayed to him with all my soul, as I am praying now! Perhaps I was too self-willed, and wanted my own way too much, and so he would not hear me. Oh, I *want* to do his will—I want to let him choose for me; but, oh, far more than that I want my love, my darling, my husband! We have been joined together by God, and he has not put us asunder, nor has man put us asunder. Neither did he do it! It was I,—I myself,—out of my weak selfishness and self-will, because I wanted to make everything conform to me—because I wished him to love me by a rule and ideal of my own—to treat me according to my fancy—to make every sacrifice of himself and his nature and thoughts and feelings to me, and I was willing to consider him in nothing! But oh, my God, I have been shown my wickedness and selfishness! The scorching light of truth has come, and now I see it all. If I could have him back! If I could wipe out the past, and be once more in my wedding-dress and veil, and give him my vows again, O God, thou knowest whether I could keep them now or not! It cannot be, it cannot be! He pities me and would be

kind to me, but he does not love me any longer. O God Almighty," she cried aloud, writhing her body from the lounge, and getting on her knees, with her hands and her face lifted upward, "take me and work in me, and give light to my blinded eyes! Give me the strength to do what is right — to give him up — to stop thinking of him! I cannot bear this tearing struggle any more. I can fight no longer. I beg thee only, only for this — that I may somehow grope and stumble through this time without the loss of the one thing that is left to me — my woman's pride!"

She fell forward, with her face buried in the lounge, and great sobs shaking her body. Gradually these subsided; but long after they had ceased she knelt there with her face concealed, alone in the silence and darkness.

At the same moment, only a little distance off, the sunlight was pouring down in floods upon the palms, the stuffs, the pictures, the statues, and the crowd of fashionable men and women who thronged the great exhibition of the spring Salon.

Voices of men and women rose melodiously, whether in praise or blame. Lorgnettes

were raised, hands clasped in delight, and shoulders shrugged in disapproval. Fans were waved in delicate, gloved hands, whose every movement stirred the air in waves of sweet perfume from flowers, or delicate odors wafted from women's gowns. Smartly dressed men and women stood about in groups, and now and then a hum arose as some great man, decorated with orders, and smiling with confident good humor, passed along, bowing to right and left, and receiving compliments—too familiar to be anything but gently stimulating—on the beauty of his latest pictures.

There were groups, larger or smaller, before many of the canvases; and in one of these groups, standing a little apart from the rest, were Harold and Martha Keene.

The picture before which they had paused was a rather small canvas on which was painted a woman leaning with her elbows on a table, and her chin resting in her hands, which met at the wrists, and then closed upon the cheeks at either side. The little table before her was perfectly bare. There was a striking absence of detail. The one thing which was accentuated by careful and distinct painting was a plain gold ring on the third

finger of the left hand. The loose drapery which wrapped the shoulders, leaving bare the throat and arms, was simply blocked in with creamy white paint and heavy shadows. The hair was gathered in a thick coil at the top of the head. There was beauty in its coloring, and merit also in the flesh-tints of the face and throat; but the power of the picture was in the eyes, which looked directly at one. The brows above them were smooth, definite, and uncontracted. The lines of the face were youthful and round. The lips were firm and self-controlled. All the expression was left to the eyes, which, large, honest, courageous, and truthful, met those of the gazer, and gave their message—the message of despair.

“It is called in the catalogue simply ‘A Study,’” said a man standing close to Harold Keene; “and certainly there is no need to name it. The artist’s name is given as ‘G. Larrien.’ Does any one happen to know it?”

No one did, and the group of people soon passed on; but Harold stayed and looked. Martha, who stood at his elbow, was palpitating with excitement. She knew the picture and the artist, but she was determined not to

betray, even by a look, the secret which she had promised her friend to keep. She saw that Harold studied the picture with intent interest, and she schooled her face to express nothing, in case he should look at her. She was watching him closely, and she thought that his color changed a little, but he gave no other sign of feeling. He did not look toward her. Indeed, there was neither question nor curiosity in his eyes, but a look of conviction and, she thought, a look of pain.

A man and woman had paused beside them now, and stood gazing at the picture.

"It 's quite a remarkable thing," said the man; "and it appears to be by a new exhibitor. I do not know the name. It certainly tells its story."

"Yes," said his companion; "I believe that it is only through marriage that despair comes to a woman. If one painted that look in a man's eyes, one would have to invent some better explanation of it than a wedding-ring."

Harold glanced toward the speakers, and then began to move away, without looking again at the picture. Martha waited to hear what he would say; but as to this particular picture, he said nothing.

Why was it that she felt a sudden certainty that he knew who had painted it? It seemed absurd to suppose that he could, and yet she had a conviction about it impossible to shake off.

The picture, as Martha knew, had been the hasty work of a few days, and had been painted at home. When Sonia had brought it to show to Etienne, he had been so surprised and delighted at it that he had insisted upon substituting it for the careful and painstaking piece of work which she had done in the atelier on purpose for the exhibition. It was evident that he recognized some rare quality in this picture, and that others had now recognized it also. Martha, looking back, saw that another group had formed in front of it, and that animated comment was in progress.

It came over Martha now — a thing she had not thought of before — that in spite of the different contour and coloring of the whole face, there was a certain vague resemblance to Sonia in it. It was not the eyes themselves, for they were blue in the picture ; but there was something in the shape and setting of them which suggested Sonia. She wondered if the lovely princess could have been aware of this

herself, for she had shown a strong reluctance to exhibit this picture, and had required of Etienne and herself a very strict promise of secrecy about it, saying that it had been seen by them only. Martha, who knew that her friend was unhappy, and that her sorrow had come to her through her marriage, felt in her heart that Sonia had painted this picture from the look of her own eyes in a mirror when off her usual guard. She wondered if by chance Harold had had the same idea.

XVIII

THE next morning Martha drove to the apartment in the Rue Presbourg, and found her friend in bed, suffering from a headache which had been so severe that she had had a doctor. She had passed a sleepless night, and it distressed Martha much to see how really ill her beautiful princess looked. There were dark rings around the lovely eyes, and the sweet mouth, which the girl so loved, had a pathetic droop which showed that tears were not far off.

Martha tried to cheer her up, by telling her how much her picture had been noticed, and repeating some of the comments which she had overheard.

It was strange how little all this was to Sonia. Her pulses did not quicken, by one beat, until suddenly Martha said that Harold had been fascinated by it, had lingered before it and gone back to it, and that somehow she

could not help thinking that he suspected that she had painted it.

"How could he? It is impossible!" Sonia cried, a faint flush rising to her face.

"Yes; I suppose it must be," Martha conceded; "and yet there was something special about the picture to him; and after he had seen it, he certainly took no further interest in looking yours up, which, in the beginning, he had told me he was going to do."

"Martha, you must never let him know it! I trust you for that. I shall never own the picture as long as I live; and I have the solemn pledge of both you and Etienne not to betray me. You know it was against my will that I consented to exhibit it, and I could not endure to have it known that a melodramatic thing like that (for that is what it will be called) had been painted and exhibited by me. Did your brother laugh at it? Tell me the truth. If he laughed at it, I wish to know it."

She had raised herself in the bed, and sat upright, looking at Martha with commanding eyes.

"Laugh at it, Sonia? Could any one laugh at that picture—least of all Harold? It is one of the most deadly things that I ever

looked at. No; he did not laugh. Indeed, I think it took from him all power of being amused for the rest of the day. I only say this to prove that the impression which your picture made was a serious one. He said nothing about it, but I know he was impressed by it."

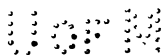
The princess fell back on her pillows, with a face so flushed and eyes so brilliant that Martha feared that she must be in a fever, and blamed herself for having talked to her on a subject so exciting as the Salon. In a few moments she rose to go. Her friend, although she declared that the visit had done her no harm, did not try to keep her, for a sudden and excited fancy had seized her.

No sooner was Martha gone than she rose quickly, rang for her maid, and began to dress, regardless of the fact that her head felt light, and her limbs were trembling. She put on a long cloak and a large black hat; and, ordering her carriage, had herself driven to the Palais de l'Industrie.

A feverish desire to see the picture again had laid hold upon her. She wanted to look at it after knowing that Harold had done so, and to judge how much she had betrayed of



"SHE PUT ON A LONG CLOAK."



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what her own heart had felt, and her own eyes had expressed, when she had painted that picture before her mirror, trusting in the complete disguise of the decided changes in features and coloring which she had made. She had painted the expression as faithfully as she could, knowing that no one who had never seen her completely off guard would recognize it. She felt now that if she should discover that there was a trace of possible identification in either features or expression, she could not endure it. Harold would think, and would have a right to think, that she had made capital out of her most sacred shame and sorrow; and he was the sort of man to whom that idea would be monstrous. She knew that she never could have painted it if she had had the least idea of exhibiting it; but when it was done, and she had shown it to Etienne to get his criticism on the technique, and he had been so plainly delighted with it, and urged her not to carry it any farther, but to exhibit it as it was, she had agreed to it for three reasons. One was to please her master, who was not very easily pleased; another was because she knew she could keep it secret by telling no one except

the two people who already knew; and the third and decisive one was that it was a way suddenly opened to her of giving her message to the world impersonally. She felt a sort of exultation in the thought that in this way she could say: "Look in my face, and see. This is marriage!"

When Sonia got out of her carriage she dismissed it with the maid, and mounted the steps with a look of greater firmness and resolution than she really felt, for physically she was ill and weak. She knew, however, that she might meet with acquaintances here, and might attract the attention of strangers by being quite alone, and therefore she realized the necessity of calmness in her outward manner. Her face was partly hid by a veil, and she had managed to avoid the gaze of one or two people whom she had recognized as she made her way quickly to the room in which she knew that her picture was hung.

In spite of her preoccupation, it quickened her pulses a little to see that there was a small group of people in front of it, evidently talking about it. As she stood behind these, and looked full at the face on the canvas, which was looking full at her, a sudden sense of con-

scious power, the knowledge that she had created a thing of intrinsic character, came over her, and she could hardly realize that it was she who had done it.

There was certainly no trace of her feature and coloring in this picture, and yet she shrank back, and had an impulse to conceal herself, for what she saw before her was undoubtedly the picture of her soul. Her heart fluttered, and she felt herself beginning to tremble. Was she going to faint here, alone? A wild sense of helplessness seized her, and at the same moment she was conscious of a certain familiarity in the outline of a shoulder and arm between her and the picture. She glanced quickly up at the head of this man, and saw that it was Harold. A little sound—scarcely more than a stifled breath—escaped her, and he turned suddenly, just in time to go to her and take her arm in his steady, reassuring grasp, which seemed to nerve her soul as well as her body to make a desperate effort for self-control.

“You are ill. You should not have ventured out alone,” he said. (Oh, the strong, protecting voice; the firm, availing touch!) Then he led her to a seat, with some quiet

words that seemed to put new power into her to endure and to resist.

"I must go home," she said, rising as she felt her strength return. "I have been ill. I did not know how weak I was."

"I will take you to your carriage," he said; and without seeming to recognize the possibility of resistance, he drew her arm in his, and led her from the room and down the steps.

It came to her, suddenly, that her carriage was not there.

"I sent the carriage away," she said. "I thought I would stay awhile, and see the pictures."

He signaled to a waiting cab, and as it drew up to the sidewalk, and he put her in, he said quietly, but with resolution :

"I cannot let you go alone in this cab, ill and faint as you are. I beg your pardon, princess; but I must go with you"; and he gave the number to the cabman, and got in beside her.

That word *Princess* stung her pride, and gave her a sudden feeling of strength. She knew that he meant to convey by its use the idea that it was only as a matter of formal courtesy that he felt bound to care for and protect

her now. She drew herself upright, with a slight bend of the head in acknowledgment of his civility.

For a few moments they drove along in silence, utterly alone together. Harold wondered if the thoughts of other days and hours were in her mind. At the same instant she was wondering the same thing about him. She had forgotten that he had just spoken of her with formality, and called her princess. Apparently he had forgotten it, too; for he now said in a low tone and with suddenness:

"Your picture is remarkable. You have told your story well."

She felt that denial would be useless. Since he had found her standing there before it, she was certain that he knew the truth as well as she did.

"I never meant that it should be known that I painted it," she said. "You must know that."

"Why should it not be known?" he said. "If a woman has looked on what those eyes have seen, surely she is called upon to give her warning. If that is what marriage meant to you, God pity you! God be thanked that you are out of it!"

At his words there rushed across her mind the memory of a thousand acts and thoughts and words of tenderness, of love, of strong protection, of help in need and comfort in distress, which this man beside her had given her. How could she tell him, though, that the ground of the despair which she had painted had been the renunciation of these—the thought that she had had a vision of what the love of man and woman could be in a wedded life, and had been shut out from it? Where were now the reasons that had seemed so powerful and sufficient for the course which she had taken? Why was it that, try as she might, she could get no sense of support and satisfaction from recalling these? Was it because she felt them to be the foolish qualms of an ignorant girl, who was prepared to fight against any and all conditions of life which did not answer to her whim? O God, the hideous possibilities of error and of wrong that were about one! How confident of right one might be in doing an act of weakness and of shame!

She could not answer his last words. She felt herself suddenly so possessed of the sense of his nearness that she could neither collect

nor control her thoughts. Her eyes were lowered, and she could not see his face; but the very sight of his strong brown hand lying ungloved upon his knee, the very bend of that knee and fold of the gray trousers, seemed as familiar to her as her own body.

Suddenly she seemed to feel that he was hers, and that she was his, whether they chose to recognize the fact or not; that God had joined them, and no man, not even themselves, had power to put them asunder.

Harold, meantime, was wondering at her silence. Why was it that, after her old defiant fashion, she had had no answer ready for his bitterly felt and spoken words? That picture had stung his soul, and he would have died sooner than have owned to himself even a wish to have her back.

In spite of this, he could not forget that they were alone together, and that she was ill and weak, and needed pity. He wondered suddenly if he had been cruel in what he had said to her, and had put too great a tax upon her strength.

As this thought crossed his mind the cab stopped, and he became aware of a din of sound, made by the tramping of men and horses, and

the blare of brass instruments and the beating of drums. The cabman leaned down and called to him, saying that the way had been crossed by a procession. It would be some time passing. Was monsieur in a great hurry? Harold answered no; and as he turned from the window he glanced toward the woman at his side, and saw that she was leaning back weakly in her corner, deadly pale. Her eyes met his, however, with a wide, direct, unflinching look, and he saw that there was no danger of her fainting. Consciousness, acute and powerful, was written in those eyes.

Outside, the crowd pushed and jostled by, while the clatter of hoofs and feet came more distinctly to the ears as the sound of the band moved off in the distance. An instinct to protect that pallid face from being gazed upon made him draw down the thick silk blinds. He did this, explaining his motive to his companion in a few quick words. Then he turned and looked at her, and in the suddenly created gloom their eyes met.

He was striving with all his might to keep the fire out of his; but suddenly he became aware of the same effort on her part, as she closed her lids an instant, and then, as if mas-

tered by a feeling stronger than her will, opened them wide, and looked at him again.

His heart leaped. His pulses throbbed. His cheeks flushed darkly. He moved a little nearer to her, so that their faces were close, and still her eyes met his with that wild, burning, concentrated gaze.

"For God's sake, what is it?" he said. But she did not move a muscle or an eyelash. She only gave her eyes to his, as one would hold up the printed page of a book to be read and understood.

"What is it?" he said again, coming so near as to speak in the lowest whisper, while his hands grasped hard the top of his stick, and his breath came thick and fast.

Her eyes still clung to his, but her lips were wordless.

"I do not understand," he said. "For God's sake, speak! I do not want to lose control of myself, but I cannot forget that you have been my wife."

These words, which moved him so that he shook visibly, made apparently no impression upon her. Her breathing was so scant and so light as scarcely to lift the lace upon her breast; and, near as he was to her, he could not hear

it. Was she, perhaps, unconscious? He might have thought so, but for the deep, intense consciousness in the gaze that she fixed upon him, and the flutter of her long-lashed lids as she shut and opened them occasionally from the strain of that prolonged look.

Outside, the drum throbbed distantly, like the beating of a great excited heart. The thin call of a trumpet sounded keenly like a sigh of pain. Nearer the tramp of men and horses could be heard. But all these things only made them feel more absolutely alone together—this man and this woman who had once been one in marriage! With his breast heaving quickly with deep, uneven breaths, he suddenly uttered her name in a thick whisper.

Still she remained as she had been before, motionless and wordless, while he read her eyes. He dropped his stick, and seized her hands in both his own, which were cold and shaking.

“Speak!” he said commandingly. “In God’s name, what do you mean, unless it is that you love me still?”

Her hands were quiet and nerveless in his grasp, and in another instant he would have lost control and consciousness of what he was

doing. But at this very moment the cabman called to his horse and cracked his whip, the carriage gave a lurch forward, and they rattled rapidly away,

Recollecting himself, Harold dropped the hands which he had seized so recklessly, and touched the springs of the curtains, which instantly flew up, letting in the full light of day.

The fresh air which came in seemed to calm his heated blood, and he was master of himself again.

When he turned to look at his companion, she was leaning back in exactly the same position, only her heavy, richly fringed white lids were dropped over her eyes.

In this way she remained quite still until the carriage stopped before the door of her apartment. Harold, who thought that she had now really fainted, was about to summon help from the concierge, when she opened her eyes with a look of entire self-possession in them, got out of the cab without the aid of his offered hand, and, bowing her thanks, without speaking walked past him into the house, with a look of cool dismissal which made it impossible for him to follow.

Puzzled, confused, bewildered almost to the

point of frenzy, he got back into the cab, and ordered the driver to drive in the Bois until he should tell him to turn.

Sonia, during that same time, was shut within her room, thinking as intensely as he. She had been able, by dint of enormous will-power, to control herself in all other points while indulging herself in one. She had said to herself during those crucial minutes in the cab, while she consciously threw open the windows of her soul to this man in that clear and unrestricted gaze, that she would neither speak nor stir, though the effort should kill her. She found that she could best carry out this resolve by relaxing her body utterly, while her will got every moment tenser in its strain. She had said to herself over and over to what seemed a thousand times: "Don't move—don't speak. Don't move—don't speak"; and the very consciousness that she was equal to this effort made her the more free in the abandonment with which she had let him read her heart in her eyes.

Now, as she threw her wraps aside, and paced up and down her room, a feeling of delicious exultation possessed her, and the physical weakness which she had lately felt was

gone and forgotten. It had been a draught of intoxicating joy simply to look at him with free and unbridled eyes. Was he not her husband, who could not be, by any act of man, really parted from her? What had she shown him but a woman's feeling for her wedded lover? Was she crazy, she wondered, that she could have done it then, and could feel now no regret—only a wild delight—in having done it? O God, O God, how long it was that she had shut herself off from feeling, and how good it was to feel once more! She was alive in every nerve and pulse, as she had not been for so long; and the throbbing of life was sweet, sweet, sweet! Never mind about the future; she would meet it boldly, and make up some excuse—that she had been ill or unconscious in the cab—pretend that she had forgotten the whole thing—do anything that was needed, as to that!—but the throbbing bliss of that one half-hour, she exulted that she had been bold enough to make her own.

XIX

THE *cours* was closed at Etienne's, but Sonia, who could not bear to face the hours of idleness which each day must contain during the few weeks which her aunt was still to spend in Paris, got permission to come and work in the atelier during the afternoons. She was privileged to get her own models as she required them, and Martha was to come also when she had time and inclination.

The day after her encounter with Harold at the Salon, Sonia, strong in purpose and confident in will, went to the atelier with only Inking to protect her and keep her company, and set resolutely to work to do some severe drawing.

She had abundance of both time and space now, and she settled herself with great care and deliberation, with the anatomical figures and numerous copies of Ingres' drawings full in view. She had not worked very long, how-

ever, before her enthusiasm began to ebb, and she put down her charcoal and went across to the model-throne, where she sat down with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands, and fell to thinking deeply. Inkling came and jumped up in her lap, but she pushed him away with a roughness unusual to her, and he had to content himself with curling up on her skirt. As she sat there, conscious of being quite alone, she was as absolutely still as any of the customary holders of this position; but the varied expressions which crossed and changed her face would have made any class of students in the world despair of such a model. Sometimes she would look quite happy for an instant, as if a thought of joy had forced its way uppermost. Then again deep pain would come into her face, and shadows of doubt, perplexity, and hopelessness.

She sat so for a long time. Inkling had had a deep and peaceful sleep on the soft folds of her gown, from which he was startled by a knock at the door. His mistress sprang up suddenly, rolling him over, and he began to bark furiously, while Sonia, with an attitude of studious absorption, took her place at the easel, and seized her bit of charcoal. She

thought it was probably only some boy on an errand, but she was also acutely conscious of whom it might possibly be. So she was not entirely unprepared for the sight of Harold appearing quickly around the edge of the old sail-cloth screen.

He bowed with a brevity and formality which seemed to imply that she need fear no agitating disturbance from him; but instead of standing in his place and stating the reason of his presence, he came forward.

Inkling, wild with excitement, began a repetition of his frantic performances of the former occasion; but his mistress, determined to have nothing of that sort, promptly suppressed him, and he slunk away and lay down with great meekness.

Harold, seeming to take no cognizance of the dog, came nearer, and waited until the absorbed figure before the easel should notice him. Presently she did this by saying formally:

"Martha is not here. She has not been here to-day."

"She is at home. I have just left her," he answered.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I thought you had come to see her."

"No; I have come to see you."

"To see me?" lifting her eyebrows in light surprise.

"If you are at leisure."

"I am busy, as you see; but I can talk to you as I draw, if you don't mind."

"If you will allow me, I will wait until your drawing is done."

"That would take up too much of your time," she said, laying down her charcoal, and elaborately brushing off her fingers with her handkerchief.

"Not at all. I have nothing to do."

"I would rather speak to you first—whatever it is you have to say—and go on with my work afterward. I dislike to draw with people looking on."

"In that case I will ask you to give me your attention at once. Will you, perhaps take this seat?"

He indicated an old wooden arm-chair; but she declined it with a quick motion, and went over and took her old place on the model-throne, lifting Inkling to her lap. Harold seated himself on a bench directly facing her.

"I am sorry if I am annoying you," he said;

"but I cannot take the consequences of not speaking to you now."

"Consequences?" she said. "What consequences?"

"Consequences to you and to me. I will ask you to be kind enough to look at me while I explain them."

Her eyes were fastened upon Inkling, and she kept them so, while she began to twist his soft ears. There was a moment of intense stillness throughout the room. Then the man, in a voice of deep concentration, spoke her name.

"Sophie," he said.

"Pray don't call me by that name," she answered quickly. "I have never liked it, and I wish now to forget it."

"Sonia, then, if you prefer it. I want simply to make plain the fact that I am speaking to *you*, the woman who bears that name, and not to the princess, as you are supposed to be."

"Go on," she said.

He was silent. She kept her eyes fixed on the dog until she was afraid that her stubbornness would look childish, or, worse even than that, timid. Then she looked up.

The next instant she wished that she had not,

for the compelling look that met her own did for a moment make her feel afraid. She summoned all her force, however, and looked at him defiantly, her head raised, her eyes steady.

"I want you to explain to me what you meant yesterday," he said.

"What I meant yesterday? What do you mean?"

"What you meant yesterday, driving home in the cab."

"What I meant yesterday by driving home in the cab? I suppose my meaning was the obvious one — that I was tired and ill, and that my own carriage was not there."

The timidity which she had felt before grew now into positive terror, as she felt the masterful force of this man's power over her. So strong was her sense of it that she felt absolutely reckless of what she said or did, so long as she was able to resist him.

"You will not move me, or change my intention — my *determination* to get an answer to my question. Your evasion of it is childish as well as useless."

"I will be childish if I choose. Who is to prevent me?" she said defiantly.

"I will. I have no intention of submitting

to any such childishness now. You are a woman, and you are the only woman who exists for me. In that character I mean to have your answer to my question."

His words made her heart throb quick, with a feeling outside of the terror of self-betrayal by which she was possessed. She gave no outward sign, however, as she looked down, and began once more to pull at Inkling's ears.

Before she realized what he was doing, Harold had bent forward, and lifting the dog from her lap, he set him on the floor, with a shove that sent him half-way across the room. As the little creature ran off frightened, Harold turned to the woman facing him, and forcibly took both her hands in his.

She jerked them from him with a powerful wrench, as she sprang to her feet, retreating a few paces until she was stopped by some benches and easels huddled together on that side of the room.

"Don't touch me!" she cried, in a voice of real terror.

He let his hands drop to his sides, but he followed, and stood very close to her, as he said:

"You had better answer me, and let me

have my way. I am not to be turned now. This interview between us must be final, and I promise you that after it you shall be safe from any persecution from me. Now, however, the present moment is my own. I have you in my power—and that power I intend to use!”

“An honorable and manly thing to say!” she panted, her eyes blazing and her lips curled. “Do you mean me to understand that you would use force to make me comply with your wish?”

“I mean just that,” he answered, bending over her with eyes that gave her the feeling of a physical touch. “I will prevent your leaving this room until you have honestly and fairly spoken to me, and have either confirmed or denied what your eyes plainly said to me yesterday.”

“You are cowardly and cruel!” she cried. “You are taking a mean advantage of me! I was ill yesterday. I was half unconscious —”

“You may have been ill,” he interrupted. “I know indeed that you were, and that physical weakness may have led to self-betrayal; but you were not unconscious. Far from it. You were never more acutely conscious in

your life than during those long moments when you looked at me with love."

"I deny it!" she cried angrily.

"Useless!" he answered. "It is not to be denied."

She tried to draw farther away, but the barricade of easels stopped her. Then he himself stepped backward, and put some feet of space between them.

"I cannot bear to see you shrink from me," he said. "You will have to forgive a persistence that may seem to you brutal; but fate has put this opportunity into my hands, and I'd be a fool not to use it."

"And what do you expect to get from it?" she asked.

"An answer in plain words to this question, Do you, or do you not, love me?"

"I do not!" she cried hotly; but her breast was heaving so, her heart was throbbing so, that she could scarcely catch her breath; and she felt that not for all the world dared she look him in the face.

"Your eyes yesterday contradicted your words of to-day," he said. "I will not be content until I have had both. So help me God, you are not going to trifle with me

now! I will make you look at me, and confirm with your eyes the words you have just spoken, or I'll have you for my wife again!"

He caught her in his arms, and drew her close against him. She opened her mouth as if to scream, but he laid his palm upon it, not forgetting, for all his strength, to touch her gently.

"Oh, my darling, my precious one," he said, "don't call out for protection from me, as if I were your enemy! Surely you know that I would die by torture before I would hurt you—body or soul. But something—a wicked pride, perhaps—is making you struggle against the truth; and, for your sake as well as for my own, I must make a fight for it. Look! I offer you the chance. If you can look me in the face, and say with eyes and lips together, 'Harold, I do not love you,' then you are as free as air. If you can do that, I will go, and never cross your path again."

He had taken his hand from her mouth, for fear her panting breaths would cease. He could feel the violent beating of her heart against his side. An overwhelming tenderness and pity for her filled him, and his arm, relaxing its stern pressure, drew her close,

with an embrace whose only constraint was that of love. Her ear was very close to him, and he spoke to her in the lowest whispers.

"Dear one," he said, "what is it you are fighting against, if it be not the coming back of love and joy?"

He could not see her eyes. He did not wish to see them yet. This waiting was bliss, because there was hope in it.

She had ceased to struggle, and was quiet in his arms. They stood so, many seconds, their hearts throbbing against each other, their cheeks pressed. In the unspeakable sweetness of his nearness, Harold felt against his face the moisture of a tear.

"What is it?" he whispered. "You are crying! For God's sake, tell me why!"

A gentle little head-shake answered him; but she made no motion to draw herself away, and he, enraptured, held her close.

"There is nothing — *nothing* that you cannot tell to me," he said, still in that whisper that thrilled the silence of the room. "Perhaps you do not understand. Listen, and I will make it all plain. I loved you then. I love you now. I have loved you through all the pain and silence in between. Oh, dear-

est, never dream but that you are still my own — wholly and unchangeably as I am yours — if only you love me!”

She kept so still that he was puzzled. He made a motion to draw back his head and look at her, but she put up her hand and pressed his cheek still closer against hers. He passionately wished that she would speak; but there was no sound except that fluttered breathing, no motion but that little tremor which he felt against his side. She was weakening, weakening, weakening — he was sure of this; but he was in such an absolute terror of misunderstanding her mood that he dared not move or speak.

As they stood there so, he felt a sudden tightening of the pressure of her arms. They strained him close against her. His heart leaped; but he was not sure. There was something that alarmed him even in that clasp of love.

“Are you happy?” he whispered in the lowest murmur. But with a sudden wrench she tore herself away from him, and when he tried to follow, waved him back with a gesture which he could not disregard.

“Happy!” she said in a voice that mocked

the thought, as she wrung her hands together, and then, for a moment, hid her face in the curve of one tensely bended arm. "What have I to do with happiness?" she cried out, flinging wide her arms, and looking upward, as if appealing to some invisible presence rather than to him or to herself. "I had it given to me once in boundless measure, and I played with it, and tossed it from me. It was lightly and easily done, and now it cannot be undone."

Harold stood where her imperious gesture had stopped him, and looked at her in consternation.

"What do you mean?" he said. "You will not try now to deny your love for me! You have owned it in that close embrace which can mean nothing but—"

"Good-by!" she interrupted him. "It means inevitable parting. You must go, or, if not, I must fly to some place where we cannot meet again."

"But, dearest, we cannot part. I have told you how I love you in plain words. You have told me the same, without the need of words."

She looked at him,—a deep, inscrutable gaze,—and shook her head.

"I have had perfect love once," she said, "and from you—the one man whose love could ever have any meaning for me—love that included perfect trust, perfect confidence, perfect respect. I refuse to take from you a smaller thing. It is easier to give you up than to face that thought."

"But Sonia! Darling! You have got that love! I tell you it is just the same!"

She shook her head.

"It cannot be," she said. "You would feel that what had been once might be again. You could never feel secure for even one moment. I could not bear it. You must remember what I felt in that one embrace. Oh, Harold, I *want* you to remember that! And now you must let me go."

"Go?" he said. "Where should you go, but here to me—to your right place, your home, your husband?"

At this last word she gave a sharp cry. She had been standing unsupported, and now a sudden trembling seized her, and she half tottered toward a chair. In an instant he was at her side, his arms about her, fast and sure. It was too sweet, this strong and tender holding up of her weak body. She let it be, but she was motionless and wordless in his arms.

"My own child," he said, "there can be no question as to our future now. It was all a mistake — the past! If we acknowledge it —"

"Oh, the past, the past!" she said. "I can never get away from it. We have lost two years. No matter if we had the whole future of time and eternity, we could never get those back — and it was I that did it! It is good of you to say that you forgive me; but I — oh, I never can forgive myself! You never can believe in me again. I dare not ask or look for it. I don't deserve it. You would be wrong and foolish if you did."

"Then wrong and foolish I will be!" he said. "I will believe in you again and again, forever! You have forgotten something, Sonia. There is no question of judgment between you and me, because you are myself. Do you not feel that that is so?"

She did not answer, and he said again, in that compelling tone she knew so well:

"Do you not feel it so, my wife?"

She raised to his, unswervingly, eyes that were clear as stars after their recent tears. She unveiled her soul to him as daringly as she had done yesterday, and the message that they gave him was the same — abundant, free, unstinted love, without reserve or fear.